PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1992-93

COMPRISING PERIOD
4 May—14 May 1993

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 224**

EIGHTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1992-93

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Community Care

1. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the progress of the community care reforms in Somerset; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tim Yeo): Our new community care arrangements came into operation in all parts of the country on 1 April. It is now for local health and social services authorities to make full use of the enormous opportunities that those arrangements present. Our monitoring showed that authorities in Somerset were well prepared to take advantage of those opportunities for the benefit of both users and carers.

Mr. Robinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that Somerset was one of the best prepared counties in its plans for implementation of the community care programme? Would he also agree that that is a good reason to re-elect the Conservative-controlled authority on Thursday?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has put his finger right on the point. As we would expect, the excellent Conservative-controlled Somerset county council is taking its new and substantial responsibilities extremely seriously. Only by re-electing that Conservative council can we hope to preserve user choice, continue to raise standards and, above all, get the best value for money out of the enormous increase in resources that the Government have given Somerset—a 22 per cent. real increase over the past three years in the personal social services standard spending assessment and, on top of that, a special grant of £5·8 million for comunity care.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that, far from benefiting from care in the community, the shire counties are already discovering very directly that there are real problems? Is he also aware that some private firms are charging £25 a head for information about private homes? Is that what he means when he speaks about endeavouring to improve patient care?

Mr. Yeo: I am certainly aware that some councils, such as the Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council, are failing to co-operate with the independent sector, refusing to consult with independent providers of community care because of their dogmatic insistence that these services can be delivered only by a public sector monopoly. The Government will not tolerate that from shire counties or anywhere else, and Labour-controlled councils that are continuing to cling to out-of date dogma must heed this warning now.

2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the progress of the community care reforms in Kent; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: As I said earlier, our new community care arrangements came into force on 1 April in all parts of the country. They present substantial new opportunities for local health and social services authorities. Our monitoring of preparations in Kent showed that Kent

county council was one of the best prepared of all authorities to take full advantage of those opportunities for the benefit of users and carers.

Mr. Arnold: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Kent care managers have been in place for three years and that Conservative-controlled Kent county council has developed an excellent database in co-ordination with the general practitioners to ensure that individual packages for the people who need care are properly in place? Is this not an example of what Conservative-controlled Kent county council has done, and should not that example be followed throughout the country?

Mr. Yeo: I am glad to say that my hon. Friend has also put his finger right on the point. I gladly join him in paying tribute to the superb policies of Conservative-controlled Kent county council under its excellent chairman of social services and her fine team of supporting officers.

My hon. Friend mentions one of the many fields in which Kent county council is leading the way. There is one more—that council's co-operation with the independent sector. Kent county council is funding Age Concern to take over the running of many of its elderly persons' day centres. Such co-operation between Kent county council and the voluntary sector clearly gives the lie to Opposition assertions that the Government's insistence that the bulk of the special transitional grant must be spent buying services from the independent sector—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be obliged if the Minister would address the Chair. Not only can I not hear him but his remarks cannot be heard publicly when he turns in that way.

Mr. Yeo: I apologise, Madam Speaker.

Let me conclude by saying that that co-operation between the voluntary sector in Kent and the county council gives the lie to Opposition claims that the Government's insistence that the bulk of the special grant must be spent purchasing services from the independent sector perpetuates the residential model. It clearly does not.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Bearing in mind the fact that, under the Government's bizarre system for distributing community care funding, Kent receives money that should have gone to other areas, notably the London area, because the funding is sent where people have gone to in the past rather than where they come from, does the Minister feel that Kent will be in a position to improve its performance in providing home care, given that, according to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy league table, it is 28 out of 32 in terms of county councils, with Labour Derbyshire county council coming top?

Does it not say something about the financial crisis facing local authorities in the implementation of the community care changes that Kent, with all its financial advantages, has to make savings of around £2 million in the current financial year?

Mr. Yeo: So far from making savings in the current financial year, apart from a proper insistence on efficiency, Kent was recognised, even by *The Guardian* on 30 March, as one of the councils that were substantially increasing expenditure on personal social services—as one would expect, because Kent received an increase of 7 per cent. this year in its personal social services standard spending assessment.

The hon. Gentleman speaks of a bizarre distribution method. We are recognising need by our distribution formula. That is the purpose of the policy—to allow authorities to respond to needs. That is why the inner-London boroughs receive almost three times the money per head of population that the shire counties receive.

Mr. Wolfson: While I welcome my hon. Friend's positive comments about Kent, may I ask him to keep a particularly close eye, as the policy develops, on two sectors? The first is the development of care for the mentally ill, and the second is the services being offered by rehabilitation centres for alcoholics and drug offenders, which have been used to drawing clients from all over the country but which, under the new system, may find that more difficult?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has already mentioned to me privately his concern with facilities for the mentally ill. I look forward to visiting his constituency soon to open a new resource provided by the independent sector in the shape of MIND. As to the provision of services for drug and alcohol abusers, my hon. Friend will be aware that we have set up special monitoring arrangements to examine closely the effects of our new policies during the first three months on the providers of those services and the access that those who need them should continue to have.

A number of county councils, including Conservative-controlled Hampshire and Surrey, have set up ring-fenced allocations from within their special transitional grant to ensure that specialist services for alcoholics and drug abusers continue to be fully utilised. In the case of Hampshire, I know that the sum that has been allocated is greater than the sum that would have been available had we gone ahead with the original intention to ring-fence money at the national level.

Nurse Training

3. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to introduce a guarantee of employment for all nurses satisfactorily completing their nurse training in 1993.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Regional health authorities and local employers manage the recruitment of qualified nurses and are already seeking ways to provide each newly qualified nurse and midwife with at least a period of employment.

Mrs. Kennedy: Does the Secretary of State accept that it costs at least £36,000 a year for every student nurse in training for three years, and that it is a monumental waste of resources to have such nurses leave the profession either to find other work or to join the dole queue? Will she accept two simple proposals that might help nurses to find work—the introduction of careers counselling for student nurses and the development of a national database for nursing vacancies?

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept the hon. Lady's comments on how expensive it is to train nurses. We need extremely competent nurses for the health service of today and tomorrow, and that is why we have invested £321 million

on Project 2000—£114 million this year. I am pleased to say that five out of six nurses gain employment immediately upon qualifying, and all regions are exploring various ways of taking the matter further. They could well follow the example of Mersey in this area, as in so many others, which has ensured that the number of nurses being trained meets the requirements of the health service. That is a matter for the regions to explore, using the many means at their disposal.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. Friend concede that British nurses are the best trained in the world and that when they are trained they are the hardest working, most dedicated workers that one could ever see? As today's high-tech training of nurses far exceeds that in the days of Florence Nightingale, will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that regional health authorities gauge more carefully their labour requirements for the years ahead so that we do not train these wonderful people only for them to find that they have no jobs at the end?

Mrs. Bottomley: As ever, my hon. Friend has it exactly right. British nurses are among the best in the world. During my recent visit to Russia, for example, I was particularly pleased to see much British nursing expertise being put to good effect. But it is because we believe in nurses that we have treated them so well, increasing their pay by 50 per cent.—unlike the Opposition, who cut it by 3 per cent.—and introducing the new independent pay review body, the new clinical grading system and Project 2000. My hon. Friend has it right. All regions should do as well as Mersey and ensure that they balance their training input with the number of jobs.

Mr. McCartney: Is it not a disgrace that the Secretary of State gave no commitment to the House today to guarantee a job for every student leaving nursing college in the next financial year? In Leeds, there is 70 per cent. unemployment among student nurses leaving college, in Birmingham, there are 200 applicants for every three nursing jobs and 50 per cent. of student nurses cannot find a placement at the end of their training. Yet the Government have wasted £86 million on incompatible computer software for GP fund holders. That is equivalent to 6,880 new nursing jobs. Is it not time that the Government got their priorities right and spent money on nurses who have completed their training?

Mrs. Bottomley: Is it not typical of the Labour party that it always tries to find the cloud over the silver lining? Nurses now stay in the health service for an average of 14 years compared with an average of seven years previously. Turnover has fallen to about 10 per cent. and as low as 3 per cent. in some places. That is because nurses know that they have a worthwhile future in the health service and will continue to do so. Of course I regret those few trained nurses for whom there is no immediate employment; that is why regions are working hard to try to find ways to try to prevent that. But nobody should think other than that nurses have an extremely worthwhile career in the health service, as set out in the chief nursing officer's vision for the future only last week.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that nurses in Merseyside and the United Kingdom as a whole have benefited tremendously from initiatives such as Project 2000, improved clinical grading schemes and improved training and education, the likes of which were not seen when Labour was in office?

Mrs. Bottomley: How right my hon. Friend is. Nurses will look back at those days when not only the capital programme of the health service was cut, but nurses' pay was cut in real terms—a disgraceful record. As my hon. Friend so rightly says, we have introduced all the key elements that nurses so wanted. "The Health of the Nation", the patients charter and the health service reforms all rely on committed, well-qualified nurses. I am pleased that that is the case in this country.

Dental Services

4. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to ensure that family health services authorities will be able to purchase general dental services in the most cost effective manner.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Family health services authorities do not at present purchase general dental services. Giving them that role is one of the many options identified in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, on which we are currently consulting interested groups.

Mr. Corbett: Is the Minister able to tell the House that he has rejected Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's recommendations on withdrawing dental services from 1 million nursing mothers and pregnant women? Does he understand that dental treatment delayed or avoided will cost more in the end and will damage the nation's teeth?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand that Sir Kenneth produced a comprehensive report and one that has been widely welcomed and appreciated. We are committed to consulting on it, and those consultations are going ahead and producing ideas from a variety of interested groups on how we should best move forward. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that. When we are in a position to let him have decisions we shall make them available to the House.

Mr. John Marshall: Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether there were more or fewer national health service dentistry through-patients in the first six months of this year? Can he also tell the House how many NHS dentists there are today compared with 1978?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to be able to tell my hon. Friend that 28 per cent. more dentists are operating in the health service today—the precise figure is 17,871. I am also happy to be able to tell him that, since 1978, there has been an increase of about 8 million courses of adult treatment per year. He will also be encouraged to know that, since 1 July, 640,000 more patients have registered for NHS dental treatment. Those are all records of which the Conservative side of the House can be justly proud.

District Health Authorities (Funding)

5. **Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review the formula used by her Department for funding district health authorities; and whether she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for regional health authorities to keep allocation formulae for allocating to districts under review. The Department is reviewing the formula for allocating to regions, and will give guidance to regional health authorities on any lessons learned from the national review which might profitably be applied in the regions' district formulae.

Ms Short: The Minister will know that the formula used nationally rightly gives a higher weight to the number of elderly people in an area, because they are heavier users of the health service. As a consequence, areas such as mine in west Birmingham—a poor community, where people on average live less long—lose money for the health service, and that has been recognised locally as some adjustments have been made.

I should like an undertaking that, until the Minister can get the formula right, my area and others like it—I think that there are six in the country—will not lose any money because of the defect in his formula.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the hon. Lady's argument, and also that west Birmingham is considerably over the capitation formula arrangements. In my answer to her question, I sought to encourage her that we are considering more direct measures for NHS care and treatment, as part of our response to the 1991 census and our review of the formulae that we apply to make money available to regional health authorities.

A better basis may emerge from our review—rather than simply issues based on social deprivation—which we might be able to commend to regions for consideration. As the hon. Lady knows, however, decisions on capitation allocations are ultimately matters for the regions.

Mrs. Roe: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the level of health spending and how the money is distributed are clearly important, one should judge the success of the health service by the number of patients treated and the quality of service provided? Has my hon. Friend seen the recent Labour party publication which claims to provide an overview of the health services but which hardly mentions patients in its general obervations? Does not that show that the Opposition have got their priorities all wrong?

Dr. Mawhinney: As always my hon. Friend is exactly right. I searched almost in vain for a mention of the word "patient" in the latest Labour party document. I found the Labour party view that the health service was about £40 billion underfunded. Now we all know that Labour wants to add 26p to the basic rate of tax to fund the NHS. We do not know how much the Liberal Democrats would like to add to the basic rate. They also always claim that more money should be spent—but they do not have the guts of the Labour party to say how much.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Minister compensate the people of the west midlands for the £10 million wasted as a result of incompetence, if not corruption, on the part of those whom the Government put in charge of that health authority's affairs?

Dr. Mawhinney: No doubt the hon. Lady was pleased to learn that this year, West Midlands regional health authority received £1·855 billion to spend on health care delivery in the region, which was an increase of more than 2·9 per cent. in cash or 1 per cent. in real terms.

The hon. Lady made a serious point. She knows that the Government take the matter seriously. Recently, I visited Birmingham to make sure that all the lessons that needed to be learned from recent events in the west midlands have been learnt and that appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that they do not occur again. I was encouraged not only by the actions taken by Sir Donald Wilson as the authority's new chairman but by the new mood of confidence and determination pervading the authority, which will ensure that the people of Birmingham and of the west midlands receive the best possible health care, which they deserve.

NHS Trusts

6. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts are in operation in the Oxford region; what was the number in April 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Oxford region is an excellent example of the growing success of the trust movement. From 1 April, 15 units—nearly two thirds of all those in the region—achieved trust status.

Sir Anthony Durant: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, thanks to the excellent work of NHS trusts, including the Royal Berkshire hospital and Battle hospital—which cover my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of Newbury—the 18-month waiting list for cataract, hip and knee operations has been eliminated? That is thanks also to the policies promoted in our manifesto.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that my wife and I attended Royal Berkshire hospital following an accident at Christmas? My wife underwent a serious operation on her shoulder. We received that treatment as national health service patients—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) realises that. As NHS patients, we received an excellent service.

Mrs. Bottomley: I confirm my hon. Friend's comments about the Oxford region and about Newbury in particular. Not only in Oxford but throughout the country, no patient is waiting longer than 18 months for a hip replacement or cataract operation. At the end of last month, only eight patients were waiting for a knee replacement. We have passed another milestone in our sustained and increasingly successful drive to reduce long waiting times. We have honoured a key pledge in our manifesto and in the patients charter.

I must tell my hon. Friend that he has sold the residents of Newbury short. At the West Berkshire priority care NHS trust, which I visited last week, no patient is waiting longer than 15 months. That is a substantial achievement. I am delighted that the care received by my hon. Friend and his wife at the Royal Berkshire trust was of such high quality. A recent patient survey in Newbury showed that well over 90 per cent. of patients were very satisfied with the health care that they receive.

Mr. Skinner: If the NHS satisfies the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and one or two others in the Tory party, why does not the Secretary of State tell every member of the Tory Cabinet to use the NHS?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is characteristic of Labour to be obsessed with a vicious vendetta against the private sector. I regard the private sector as partners, not pariahs. It is my

responsibility to ensure that the NHS continues to improve and to treat patients to an ever higher standard. The dramatic reductions in waiting times are a great achievement, as are the new immunisation figures that I was able to announce over the weekend. Nye Bevan would be cheering in his grave.

GP Fund Holders

7. **Mr. Roger Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the interest of family doctors in the general practitioner fund-holding initiative; and how this has changed since April 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 6,000 general practitioners in 1,200 practices are now fund holders. The number of practices in the scheme is now four times as many as in April 1991 and one in four of the population is benefiting from having a fund-holding GP.

Mr. Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a further piece of good news and that the extension of GP fund-holding, promised in the Conservative election manifesto, is one of the best ways of improving patient care and making the health service more responsive to people's needs?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That causes unhappiness to the Labour party's ideologues —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have heard enough from the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Boyce).

Dr. Mawhinney: However, it is of great benefit and encouragement to patients. I can tell my hon. Friend that we are looking for ways to extend GP fund holding even more widely, particularly for those practices which by themselves cannot meet the 7,000 practice list requirement.

Ms Lynne: Has the Minister looked into the possibility of setting up locality fund-holding practices, which will help us to get away fromt the two-tier system where fund holders' patients often jump the queue?

Dr. Mawhinney: That is nonsense. As I made clear in Chester the other day, the hon. Lady is going to have to come to terms with the fact that from now on we have shared purchasing in the health service. If the reforms are about providing the most patient-sensitive treatment and care possible, GPs are in a maximal position to determine what is good for their patients. Their role in purchasing is central to the reformed NHS and not only will we not back away from it, as the hon. Lady wants, but we will seek to advance it.

Mr. Sims: Is not one of the most positive aspects of GP fund holding the arrangement whereby consultants can attend at GPs' surgeries, which must be for the benefit of patients? Is my hon. Friend aware that there is some concern among consultants in dermatology, whose numbers are small and who are worried that they may spend too much time travelling, which is not the best use of an important but limited resource?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Recent surveys have shown that 70 per cent. of fund holders report reductions in waiting times, more than 60 per cent. report improved services for follow-up appointments and over 50 per cent. report increased consultant services in their surgeries. I visited a fund-holding surgery on Saturday and was able to see physiotherapy being delivered to a patient, which was clearly to the benefit of the patient. I note the other point that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Minister confirm that he has direct responsibility for the implementation of the Government's proposals for health care in London and that on 16 February the Secretary of State, in her statement to the House and in public pronouncements, gave the impression to the world that new money was to be invested in primary health care and GP practices in London? Will he now confirm that that was grossly misleading—that there is to be no new money and that the money that is to be applied is being taken from other vital health care investment, in London and the rest of the English regions?

Mr. Mans: Nonsense.

Dr. Mawhinney: I think that is probably as good a response to the hon. Gentleman's question as I can think of. The hon. Gentleman knows—although he may not understand—that we have made a real increase in the NHS budget this year. That real increase has been distributed down the normal channels through which money flows from the centre to health care delivery, and it is that real increase which is helping to fund the resources in London. If it were not for this Government, the extra resources would not be made available to improve primary and community health care services in London: that is certainly the tenor of Labour party policy. I am sure that the people of London are very pleased that the Labour party is in opposition and that we are in government.

8. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fund-holding practices are in operation in the north-west region; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): Three hundred and twenty-nine general practitioners in 83 practices are now fund holders in the north-west. That means that nearly one in five of all those living in the north-west now benefits from being registered with a fund-holding practice.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend agree that there must be considerable satisfaction about the increase in the number of fund holders in the north-west region? For the benefit of the whingers on the Opposition Benches, can my hon. Friend list some of the benefits that patients in the north-west will get from fund holding?

Mr. Sackville: I am glad to do so. They will get greater flexibility and an entirely new attitude from general practitioners to the management of their practices. Fund holding will transfer much of the power from hospitals to general practitioners and their patients. May I say, as a fellow north-west MP, that I am sorry that the figure is not greater than one in five of all those who live in the north-west. That is attributable not just to the fact that there are many single-handed and small practices but to the political nonsense that is talked by the Labour party, which represents GP fund holding as being everything that it is not. It is a further example of how the Labour party does not give a fig about patients, only about scoring its own miserable political points.

Mr. Bryan Davies: How will GP fund holders and, even more so, those doctors who stay fully loyal to the NHS provide an adequate service for their patients if trusts such as the Royal Oldham trust place increasing emphasis in their business plans on private practice?

Mr. Sackville: The suggestion that fund-holding GPs are disloyal to the NHS is outrageous. They are some of the finest GP practices in the country and will be joined by many more, including many single-handed and small practices which are taking advantage of agency arrangements. As for the hon. Gentleman's question about trusts placing increasing emphasis on private practice, surveys show that referral patterns by GP fund holders have remained the same as those of non-fund holders. They have referred fewer rather than more patients to private practice.

Family Doctors' Lists

9. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of patients on each family doctor's list *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 1 October 1979, the average number of patients on family doctors' lists in England was 2,286; the provisional figure for 1 October 1992 is 1,922, representing a reduction of 16 per cent.

Mr. Wells: As a member of another family that is entirely dependent on the NHS, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that reduction? Does not it mean that every GP can spend more time with his patients and can concentrate on preventive medicine, such as the child immunisation programme?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The family doctor service is the basic building block of the NHS. It has a central role in educating the family over the lifetime of that family. My hon. Friend, like so many others, has great confidence in the changes that are taking place. We have almost eradicated a great number of childhood diseases as a result of the success of GP contracts. The Labour party, as ever, resists change and it resisted the GP contract. The success of GPs, health visitors and practice nurses has saved hundreds of thousands of hospital admissions and the lives of tens of thousands of children—once again, a great success.

Mr. Madden: What safeguards exist to ensure that people who are wholly unqualified are not allowed to practise as family doctors? Has the Secretary of State agreed to establish an independent inquiry into how Mohammed Saaed could practise as a general practitioner in Bradford for nearly 30 years, although he was wholly unqualified and despite an avalanche of complaints against him over that time? Will there be an independent inquiry into that disgraceful affair?

Mrs. Bottomley: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's deep concern about that particular matter. It is essential that when general practitioners are appointed, their qualifications are properly scrutinised. I am prepared to discuss the matter with the professional bodies involved to ensure that all possible steps are taken to avoid such an occurrence happening again. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the quality of general practitioners in this country is second to none and such an example is a source of great concern.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the excellent information about the improvement in health care which she has just given to the House could be the reason why, in a village appraisal given to me this morning, 88 per cent. of the villagers of Caton in my constituency described themselves as being very well satisfied with the health care that they receive?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It is exactly the reason why a recent survey in Newbury also showed that patients were very satisfied with their care. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the average list size in Newbury has come down by 381 in recent years. It is a dramatic advance caused by the fact that there are 728 more medical practitioners in the area covered by Newbury.

Dental Services

10. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations she has had on the provision of NHS dental services as outlined in the Bloomfield report; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Many individuals, especially dentists, and organisations have submitted their views. I have met a wide range of interests and will continue to do so.

Mr. Enright: In his headlong, gadarene rush to commercialise dental practice, will the Minister pause for a moment and today give a clear and unequivocal guarantee that he will not rob more than 100,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers of free dental care?

Dr. Mawhinney: I did not quite recognise myself in that question. As I have already told the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), we gave a commitment to consult on the Bloomfield report. As I recall, that commitment was welcomed by members of the Labour party and, I think I am right in saying, even by members of Labour's Front Bench. That is what we are doing: we are listening to the views expressed on those and other matters and when we reach a conclusion, we shall be sure to let the hon. Gentleman and the House know what that conclusion is.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend will know, because I have written to him, that a number of my constituents are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain NHS orthodontic treatment for their children and face increasing waiting times. Will my hon. Friend undertake to examine the issue closely because it is extremely worrying that parents are not obtaining the treatment necessary for their children when it is necessary?

Dr. Mawhinney: As my hon. Friend says, he has written to me about the subject. He will know that we attach as much importance as he does to ensuring that such orthodontic treatment is available to his constituents and to those of other right hon. and hon. Members. For the most part, we are very satisfied with the provision of orthodontic treatment, but there are one or two areas that we are considering more closely to see whether further steps need to be taken.

Waiting Lists

11. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest information she has about waiting lists for hospital treatment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest information shows that last year the number of patients waiting over one year fell by over 58,000—45 per cent.—to the lowest level ever recorded. Half of all admissions to hospital are immediate. Of those who wait, 30 per cent. are admitted within two weeks, three quarters within three months and 98 per cent. within a year.

Mr. Griffiths: Is the Secretary of State aware—and, I hope, ashamed—of various devices being used to reduce waiting lists, including consultants putting cases in their drawers when they know that money is not available to fund treatment, as happened in the case of a close relative of mine, and of the underfunding of the health service, which is forcing hospitals such as the Westminster children's hospital to close specialist units and which means that potentially life-saving treatment is denied to children, who are then taken off waiting lists at a stroke?

Mrs. Bottomley: Frankly, I think that it is despicable for the hon. Gentleman to try to undermine the dramatic achievements of health service staff. There have been remarkable results in reducing waiting times, which has also set benchmarks for first out-patient appointments. If the hon. Gentleman has an isolated case that he wants me, or anyone else, to investigate, I will happily do so, but I have been impressed by the way in which region after region, having delivered the targets on in-patient and day cases, are now delivering targets and creating benchmarks on first out-patient appointments.

The individual case to which the hon. Gentleman referred is complex, requiring a specialised form of treatment. The professor responsible for the child's care at Westminster is still responsible now that he has moved to Bristol. Other hospitals are involved and are seeing whether they can find a matched bone marrow donation. The matter is complex and, of course, we all feel greatly for the family involved.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one reason why one-year waiting lists have dropped by no less than 40 per cent. in my constituency over the past year is the excellent and close relationship between the hospital and local general practitioners? Does she also agree that that could have something to do with the enthusiasm of local GPs for GP fund holding? Given the fact that by the end of the year 80 per cent. of the people in my constituency will be being treated by GP fund holders, is not it likely that that good relationship will continue?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend rightly identifies the great contribution of GP fund holding, but it is not only that: all GPs are seeing the results of our policies in practice dramatically reducing waiting times. All that the Labour party can do is follow the advice of Alice in Wonderland. As the news gets better, they get furiouser and furiouser.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Smith: Will the Prime Minister comment on the views of the European Commission's chief legal adviser that the so-called Danish opt-outs from the Maastricht treaty were worthless? Does not that coincide with the views of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who said that

"it does not alter, either the text . . . on European union, or the obligations taken on by those who ratify the treaty."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 1993; Vol. 222, c. 126.]

Does not the constitutional question now being put to the Danish people remain unchanged?

The Prime Minister: All that was set out carefully at the time, but I shall reiterate it for the hon. Gentleman. It was made perfectly clear from the start that what was agreed was an interpretation of the treaty, an intergovernmental agreement binding in international law. That was the case, is the case, and has never been in doubt.

Q2. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Booth: Does my right hon. Friend share the feeling of many Conservative Members that unit fines are not working well? Does he also share the feeling of many of us that the fact that previous convictions cannot adequately be taken into account by the courts is a great shame and will he therefore change the rules so that persistent offenders can be identified by the courts and punished severely?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that he shares the concern expressed about some, although not all, aspects of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. He has made it clear that he wants to see amendments and to introduce them as soon as is appropriate. As my hon. Friend may know, my right hon. and learned Friend met the Magistrates Association this morning to decide how best to proceed.

Mr. John Smith: As there is now overwhelming opposition from parents, teachers, governors and experts to the Government's insistence on imposing tests on schools this year, why does not the Prime Minister for once admit that he is wrong, do the sensible thing and withdraw the tests for this year?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, we have exchanged views on that subject before. We believe that it is important to proceed with the tests, not least so that Sir Ron Dearing can draw on that experience, as he has said that he wishes to do, in order to improve the tests. The right hon. and learned

Gentleman will recall frequently calling for this country's work force to be better trained. Why does he consistently oppose measures designed to bring that about?

Mr. John Smith: If the tests are so important that the Government are prepared to go well beyond the limits of reason and common sense to impose them, why are private schools, to which many Conservative Members send their children, exempt completely from them?

The Prime Minister: It is reason and common sense to test pupils. It is reason and common sense to know how well they are doing. It is reason and common sense to have that information so that we can put right the matters that are not being dealt with adequately in those schools at the moment. That is our responsibility in the state sector and that is what my right hon. Friend is seeking to do.

Mr. John Smith: Will the Prime Minister now answer the question that I put to him? What reason and common sense is there to impose them on the public sector, but to leave the private sector untouched?

The Prime Minister: We have a direct responsibility for making sure in the public sector that pupils are taught adequately and well. In the private sector the results of the schools have been very good—*[Interruption.]*—and many of them have their own tests. We have a direct responsibility in the public sector and, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the tests, for example, of seven-year-olds, have been successful. They have been good for pupils, good for teachers and good for schools. The right hon. and learned Gentleman would join forces with those who want industrial militancy to end the tests, irrespective of what he has said in the past about having a well-trained work force. Words only from the right hon. and learned Gentleman which he will not back up with action when necessary.

Sir James Kilfedder: Will the Prime Minister, on behalf of this country, express our deepest sympathy to the people of Sri Lanka following the horrific and callous murder of President Premadasa and many others? Will he express the hope that that and other atrocities will not undermine the stability of that beautiful country, which is an essential member of the Commonwealth?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend sets out views that will be shared widely across the House and the country. It was a particularly brutal and pointless assassination which will have done immense damage to Sri Lanka around the world. I wish the very best of good fortune to the new president in due course and to the Government in restoring stability after that dreadful event.

Mr. Ashdown: If the House votes to end the opt-out of the social chapter, will the Prime Minister refuse to ratify the Maastricht treaty?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is asking me to respond to a hypothetical question—*[Interruption.]*—to which I have responded on previous occasions. I refer him to my previous answers.

Mr. Spring: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports that housing repossessions are down 24 per cent. on last year? Does he agree that that is excellent news which bodes well not only for the housing sector but for consumer confidence and for continuing revival in the economy?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is excellent news. It is also excellent news that, in the view of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the action by the Government and lenders last year prevented over 50,000 repossessions that would otherwise have taken place. There are now clear signs of recovery in the housing market. That can only be helped by interest rates of 6 per cent. and mortgage rates at their lowest for over 30 years. I believe that that, together with other economic indicators in the last few weeks, point firmly to real recovery.

Q3. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Prime Minister accept the congratulations of many on these Benches that his Government are now in full retreat on his citizens charter for criminals, the Criminal Justice Act 1991? Does he now admit that he got it wrong to pass that law, which restricts the ability of the courts to send to prison people who have committed serious offences—that at a time when crime has doubled and when he has been imposing a freeze on future spending on the police? Will he now accept that his credibility as the leader of the party of law and order is in tatters?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had listened more carefully a few moments ago he would know that I said that I shared the concern about some, but not all, of the aspects of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, and we have made it clear that we are prepared to change those. The hon. Gentleman may recall that a great deal of cross-party advice on the 1991 Act was given, not least by many Opposition Members.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has rightly recognised the importance of our manufacturing and construction industries in this country's economic recovery. Competition is essential, but does my right hon. Friend accept that a level playing field is equally important? Will he state what further steps he and his Government will take to improve the ability of manufacturing and construction to contribute to the recovery of our economy?

The Prime Minister: I share the view, which has for a long time been expressed by my hon. Friend, about the importance of manufacturing industry. He will know of the remarkable improvement in manufacturing exports over recent months and the remarkable improvement in productivity of manufacturing industry. They are now biting deep with exports into the European market and beyond. My hon. Friend is right about the need to have a level playing field in Europe and beyond. As my hon. Friend will know, that will be improved by the Maastricht treaty.

Q4. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Has the Prime Minister's attention been drawn to the report issued over the weekend that the much-trumpeted decrease in the unemployment figures is little more than a piece of spring cleaning of the figures by

officials at the semi-privatised employment and benefit offices? It has been said that falsehood has a perennial spring—would not it be wiser to recognise that Britain's true unemployment rate is now in the region of 4 million? Is not that a national disgrace? When will the Government take some effective action to put people back to work?

The Prime Minister: The requirement to put people back to work is felt at least as keenly by Conservative Members as in any other part of the House, which is precisely why we have taken the difficult measures to make it possible to get people back to work in secure jobs. That is why we fail to understand why Opposition Members consistently support matters like the social charter, which would keep people unemployed for a long time.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this weekend the citizens of Gloucestershire were again subjected to an invasion of new age travellers? Is he further aware that the Gloucestershire police have done a first-class job in breaking up the convoys and keeping them on the move? Is there any chance of introducing any legislation or further measures to restrain those unwelcome visitors between now and the summer? They call themselves new age travellers, but in Gloucestershire they are known as new age vermin.

The Prime Minister: I sympathise strongly with the citizens of Gloucestershire over the trouble that they have faced with new age travellers. I warmly congratulate the police on the action that they have taken. We are examining what further legislative measures can be taken to give the police more powers, but I cannot promise that they will necessarily be introduced before the summer.

Q5. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McWilliam: Is the Prime Minister aware of any group of teachers who have said that they will not either teach or assess their pupils?

The Prime Minister: That is a question better directed to my right hon. Friend, but I am aware of teachers' leaders who seem to be encouraging their members to take industrial action against the interests of the pupils of those schools, which I regret.

Aberdeen

Q6. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to visit Aberdeen in the near future.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hope to include Scotland among them.

Mr. Robertson: If my right hon. Friend is able to visit Aberdeen at the end of the year, will he consider allowing his visit to coincide with the first wave of civil service relocations from the Department of Trade and Industry's London-based oil and gas division to Aberdeen? Will he consider opening the DTI's new Aberdeen office, which so vividly demonstrates the Government's commitment to Aberdeen, the north-east of Scotland and the North sea oil and gas industry?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly consider that invitation if it comes to me through the appropriate sources and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for anticipating it. The fact that we are opening that office shows that we are committed to expand as and when companies move key functions to Aberdeen. It certainly shows our faith in the future of the North sea industry and the north-east of Scotland. The division will begin moving there in the autumn. I know how welcome that news is to my hon. Friend and how hard he worked to bring it about.

Mr. Robert Hughes: If the Prime Minister visits Aberdeen, will he recall that the petroleum revenue tax changes he proposes will give large windfall profits to very large companies, but will savagely attack small companies, especially those in the drilling and exploration sector? If he wishes to express his confidence in the North sea, would not it be better to change that to allow people to develop fields and exploration as and when they come?

The Prime Minister: As it happens, the reform improves the incentives for further development of existing fields and new development of important fields that would have paid tax at 83 per cent. That is good for investment, jobs, Aberdeen, the north-east, Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Madam Speaker: Order. Time is up. Ten-minute rule Bill, Mr. Anthony Steen. It would be helpful if hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber would do so quietly so that we may get on with our business here. I am sure that Mr. Steen is in good voice this afternoon.

Deregulation

3.30 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to empower the Secretaries of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to repeal those rules and regulations which unnecessarily restrict the profitability and competitive nature of commerce and industry; to encourage enterprise in small businesses; and for connected purposes.

I am seeking to introduce a Bill which will dramatically cut the number of rules and regulations which, like an insidious poison, have infiltrated into every nook and cranny in our way of life. It will empower every Government Department to halt the headlong rush for more legislation; instead directing them to evaluate existing legislation, the rules and regulations which arose, the number of public officials employed and the damaging effect that such legislation has had on job creation, the private sector and its profitability.

There were five times more pages of legislation in 1989 than in 1979. What has the deregulation unit that was specifically set up to curb the growth of unnecessary rules and regulations been doing?

Brussels churned out five volumes of legislation before we joined the Community; it now churns out 37 volumes each year. What has the director-general of DG XXIII been up to with his army of officials? He has not improved the regulatory environment. As a result, our economy has been damaged because of the suffocating effect of rules and regulations accompanied by the ever increasing numbers of officials, who by their very existence erode the profitability of business and our people. Far from lifting the burden, the load has become crippling.

Perhaps the House would join me on a trip round my constituency to see what I mean. Perhaps we should start on safari at Paignton zoo, which boasts an ornamental lake. It is not infested with tsetse fly or crocodiles; it is just a common or garden lake—but not as far as the National Rivers Authority is concerned. It says that one cannot have a lake without a licence, and the licence costs money.

The zoo director tells me that the environmental health officers are hunting him down because every load of rubbish must be categorised and be accompanied by a signed certificate. Should zoo staff really be clambering over skips counting coke cans and hamburger wrappers? Enforcing those and other rules costs the zoo £60,000 a year, diverting money from investment to paying the salaries of public officials to enforce unnecessary rules and regulations which affect the zoo's viability.

Let us drop into one of our excellent supermarkets en route to our hotel. In the old days, J. Arthur Rank kept children entertained by Saturday cinema; today's supermarket equivalent should be a crèche. Not surprisingly, few supermarkets can afford that facility because of another daft regulation requiring one member of staff on duty for every eight children, two for nine children, three for up to 24 children. When there are three staff a supervisor is also required. The losers are not only the children but their parents, yet in many primary schools there is only one teacher to at least 30 children.

Time for a drink? But what is the barman up to, writing on all the labels? I forgot. He is complying with the alcohol strength labelling regulations which require a notice on every bottle of its alcohol strength. Some hon. Members may think that that is absolute rubbish, and they are right. Rubbish too is what they may see if they wend their way through the beautiful Devon countryside where, unfortunately, contractors are throwing some of their waste over the hedges rather than going through the tortuous process of using the public tip, once so simple. Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, all contractors must apply for a licence, which takes several months to process and for which they must pay, as well as a tipping ticket at £12 a throw.

Now to our hotel. It is not just the Thurlestone which has been caught up by the electricity at work regulations, whereby every electrical device must be tested regularly by a computer or a qualified electrician. Television sets, trouser presses, lamps and kettles all have to have their own log book. And, dare I say it, even the Serjeant at Arms has caught this bug. Every publicly and privately owned piece of equipment in the entire estate must be tested and logged. In the Palace of Westminster there is no problem in finding the money—alas, the taxpayer must pay—but in private hotels the owner must pay. Where does he find the money to fund additional staff? No wonder the tourist industry is suffering as a result, not just of the recession, but of a surfeit of red tape.

While we are on the Palace of Westminster, may I remind all hon. Members that office staff should not use Tippex for hiding typing errors? Together with plutonium and sulphuric acid, it is a dangerous substance under the Control of Substances Hazards to Health Regulations 1988 and must be locked away at all times, preferably in an underground bunker.

How did we get into this mess? How has all this happened without any of us apparently being aware? I have traced two principal sources: directives from Brussels and legislation from our own Parliament. Directives from Brussels are often quite sensible and come to Britain suggesting one way of dealing with a problem, but once the directive gets here Whitehall officials occupy themselves by rewriting it, more often than not with the opposite effect, causing unnecessary and often immeasurable damage. The scrap metal trade has been savagely hit by officials' interpretations, and now our chemical industry is in their sights. Then there is legislation from our own Parliament, particularly the setting up of self-financing regulatory authorities which make quangos look like cuddly toys. They are menacing monsters not only with lists of regulations to enforce but often with the ability to create new ones.

It is not surprising, therefore, that 2,945 statutory instruments came through Parliament in 1991 as a result of the many Acts of Parliament which created the self-financing regulatory authorities such as the Financial Services Act 1986, the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Bodies such as the National Rivers Authority and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service all have their own army of officials demanding compliance and threatening penalties, a racket that would not seem out of place in Palermo. Now there is talk of a new environmental agency employing 10,000 public officials.

In addition to rules and regulations there are other requirements, trade statistics, not just for the Department of Trade and Industry but for Europe whereby firms trading with other European Community countries must list the value added tax numbers of every company with which they trade and return the form within 14 days. There

is a mountain of paper requiring endless time and additional people, employed and paid by the private sector to do what is demanded.

I forgot: I should have included a visit to Dartington in my constituency which has a marvellous £170,000 arts project receiving a mere £14,000 grant from the publicly funded South West Arts. Dartington has had to employ an additional person one-quarter time to deal with the massive amount of paperwork and requests for information conditional upon the grant.

The fact that things are getting out of hand was recognised by the Health and Safety Executive when in its newsletter last November it warned against bogus burdens on business, saying that misinterpretation of the laws relating to electricity, chemicals, hazards and display equipment was causing unnecessary delay and expense to firms at a difficult time. Businessmen insist that they are not the enemy and that we must train the officials and the regulators. One cafe owner told me that the weights and measures people treated her like a criminal. Their manner was adversarial and made her feel like a crook. Christopher Booker, the well-known champion of deregulation, said:

"Trading standards officers and inspectors of pollution seemed to be imbued with a zealousness more akin to a new cult."

The threat of penalty is having the effect of freezing everything, so that it is just like Pompeii after Vesuvius erupted. It is fixing industry at a point in time, and the culture of enterprise, of entrepreneurs, is dying.

Finally, let us just drop in for a cup of tea at the South Hams district council, where officials are too aware of the damage done by too much negative application of regulations—too much stick and not enough carrot, which is exactly what my distinguished constituent, Lord Robens, implied 20 years ago. Not that local authorities do not have their problems, what with the Audit Commission pressing them to increase standards of performance, which in turn means a more rigorous application of statutory duties and regulations being more zealously enforced, when officers are faced with target enforcement standards.

This Bill attempts to turn the clock back, but it cannot happen without a fundamental culture change on the part of central Government and local government, or without the taming of SEFRAs.

3.40 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It does not seem very sensible to try to stem the number of regulations that Ministers have produced by giving Ministers more powers to make more regulations, but that is precisely what the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) proposes to do. All the regulations of which he complains have been produced by delegated powers, passed by this House, to give powers to Ministers both to make and to repeal regulations.

Instead, the hon. Gentleman should be telling Ministers to produce repeal orders to remove unnecessary regulations. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman is complaining about the very regulations and Acts of Parliament that he trotted through the Lobby time after time to support at the behest of the Whips.

If the Government are serious about getting rid of regulations, and if they really believe in the hon. Gentleman's proposal—to give Ministers more power to make more regulations to get rid of regulations—then Ministers will have the opportunity of going into the Lobby and voting for the Bill. My guess is that they will not do that.

The hon. Member for South Hams specifically mentioned health and safety at work. Is there any hon. Member who seriously wants to make the workplace more dangerous so as to create greater profits and generate more competition? We shall find out when the vote takes place. Tory Members complain bitterly about the number of days lost in strike action and cheerfully go through the Lobbies to pass legislation against trade unions. Indeed, they have done so on many occasions——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): And will do so again.

Mr. Cryer: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that probably 10 times more days are lost because of injuries at work than because of strikes. That being so, I expect all Conservative Members to vote against the Bill, which proposes to remove the health and safety provisions that attempt to protect people and stop so many days at work being lost because of the loss of life and limb.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned standards of food hygiene, too. It was not very clever of him to talk about the lowering of standards in this area. At least one Minister had to resign because of salmonella outbreaks due, surely, to a lowering of food hygiene standards. I do not suppose that any hon. Member wants those standards to fall.

The hon. Gentleman also made a point about the Common Market pouring out directives, but he has always voted for the Common Market when it has been discussed in this Chamber. The answer is not to attack it; it is to recognise that this nation and this House can produce standards if they so desire. As it happens—the hon. Gentleman does not seem to be aware of this—Common Market directives are actually reducing standards of health and safety at work. We ought to ensure that our standards are higher than those of other nations; we must preserve them.

To give carte blanche to Ministers to eradicate legislation which the House has produced is a dangerous proposal. The proposed Bill should require the House to examine primary legislation and to be careful about giving such wide powers to Ministers. The Bill contains a dangerous proposal which would compound the Government's felony of issuing regulations. Therefore, we should vote against it.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 116, Noes 166.

Division No. 254] **[3.45 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Alton, David	Browning, Mrs. Angela
Ancram, Michael	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Budgen, Nicholas
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Butcher, John
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*	Coe, Sebastian
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Colvin, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Congdon, David
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Body, Sir Richard	Cormack, Patrick
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*	Couchman, James

Dickens, Geoffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Richards, Rod
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Michael Neubert and
Mr. Anthony Steen.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Terry Lewis.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Committee), considered.

3.55 pm

Madam Speaker: Before we start the debates on the Report stage, I have an announcement. I understand that there is some interest in new clause 22, with which amendment No. 2 is grouped. I am sure that it will be of assistance to the House if I let it be known that the effects of new clause 22 and amendment No. 2 are mutually incompatible. Therefore, if new clause 22 is agreed to, amendment No. 2 will fall. On the other hand, if the new clause is defeated, I shall permit a Division on amendment No. 2 when the time comes. Perhaps we can now proceed.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that, in Committee——*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Walker: You will be aware, Madam Speaker, that in Committee, and now as we are about to debate the Report stage, there has been, and will be, no opportunity to address specifically the impact of the Maastricht treaty on the treaty of Union and thus on the creation of a single unitary Parliament. I remind you that the Scottish Parliament was never dissolved, so this Parliament, and particularly the Scottish Members in this House and peers in the other place, is the guardian of the Scottish Parliament. As we have not debated the issue——*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Walker: As we have not debated the issue specifically, and we have not been, and will not be, given the opportunity to vote on it in a way that would influence the people of Scotland, it seems that we are heading for a constitutional crisis. If the other place were to debate that aspect of the treaty of Union and the impact on that treaty of the Maastricht treaty and were to pass an amendment that took note of that, just as new clause 9, which has not been selected, would have done, would it be in order if it came back to this Chamber?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that I would not dream of determining what might or might not happen in the other place. He knows that I was more than happy to see him and colleagues to discuss the matter, and I looked at it carefully. New clause 9 is beyond the scope of the Bill and therefore out of order.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You told the House that clause 22 and amendment No. 2 are incompatible and that, unless new clause 22 were negatived, it would not be possible to have a vote on amendment No. 2. Can I take it that you would allow a vote on amendment No. 2 if new clause 22 either were not moved or were withdrawn?

Madam Speaker: Of course, if new clause 22 is withdrawn or not moved, I shall allow a vote on amendment No. 2. That is logically the case.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It would help hon. Members greatly to know whether, apart from the lead amendments in each of the seven groups, you would be prepared to allow votes on any other amendments grouped with them.

Madam Speaker: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, I considered that matter carefully before I took the Chair today, and my answer is a straightforward no, unless, of course, they are consequential. I shall not allow any other votes on the amendments.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you help the House by saying whether this is the final selection of amendments and new clauses, or might you change your mind as the debate proceeds? For example, it would have been interesting to debate the inclusion in the referendum of a question on the social chapter, a concept which has much support in the House. Is this the final selection, or may you, Madam Speaker, change your mind?

Madam Speaker: I am not after changing my mind, but the hon. Gentleman might try me.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I was disappointed that my amendment No. 54, which raises an issue on the social protocol separate from the selected amendments, is not on the list. The list is described as a provisional selection of amendments, so I was surprised to hear you say that this was not a provisional list but rather, in some respects, a final list. Will you confirm that this is a provisional list, and, if so, is there some prospect of you looking again at the separate issues that my amendment No. 54 raises?

Madam Speaker: The list has to be provisional to allow for any new circumstances that might arise. By tradition, it is always described as provisional. I have selected these amendments, and the object of so doing is to allow a full and proper debate on major areas of the Bill. I gave careful thought to the matter before doing so.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will there be an opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to explain further his attitude towards the second referendum in Denmark? You may recollect that, at the Edinburgh summit, the Foreign Secretary said:

"It is not a political reality to suppose that we would sit down and negotiate a new treaty of wherever it is with 11 members without Denmark."

Then, Madam Speaker, you will recollect——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not having long points of order today which are really matters for debate. The hon. Gentleman has a point of order for me. I think he began by asking whether I would allow the Foreign Secretary to speak. I am very willing for the Foreign Secretary or any other Member of the House to speak during the debate. Does that help the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Budgen: Not entirely, Madam Speaker, because it has since appeared that it is proposed that the 11 should meet together for some purposes which are not defined and not confined to exclude a new treaty. I hope that you will allow a debate which enables the Foreign Secretary to explain his position; otherwise, some of us might say that he had betrayed Denmark.

Madam Speaker: I have shown by the provisional list of amendments the types of debate that will be taking place.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You kindly allowed a glimmer of light to appear between what you described as your provisional selection and your final selection. I wonder whether, in that tiny space, I could insert a plea for amendment No. 3, which I am sure will have the unique attraction of uniting the House in the provision of new criteria for convergence in the treaty, and which therefore deserves the opportunity to be put to the House so that it can receive that all-party agreement.

Madam Speaker: I have given careful consideration to all the amendments. I see that amendment No. 3 stands in the name of the right hon. Gentleman, but I shall not allow a Division on that.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to the third debate, which has a constitutional character? You have selected new clause 2, standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), which relates to the constitutional method by which the House has to approve any change in the treaty, for which there is provision. We are grateful for that, as it is an important constitutional matter.

However, in the same group, you have also selected new clause 4, which deals with the proposed single common foreign and security policy. It is proposed that we should debate whether the Foreign Secretary can assent to any matter that relates to a single policy, with or without the consent of the House. If my right hon. Friend had not, in his wisdom, tabled new clause 2 and it had not existed to be selected, we might have been voting on, rather than merely debating, the important constitutional question of the control of this nation's foreign policy.

I do not wish to apply further pressure, Madam Speaker, but you should consider new clause 4 because, it was only a matter of chance that my right hon. Friend tabled new clause 2 which takes precedence.

Madam Speaker: As he well knows, the hon. Gentleman gave me a great deal of homework on constitutional matters at the weekend, and I spent a lot of time considering them as well as new clause 4. I did not come to this Chair having determined during the past hour what the House should debate, but have given the matter a lot of thought over a long period. I am afraid that the House must accept my judgment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Could you confirm, Madam Speaker, that the selection of amendments for debate and the suggestions for Divisions will mean that hon. Members who support the passage of the Bill and the social protocol will be able to unite with hon. Members who oppose the Bill and the protocol, and that they will be opposed by hon. Members who support the Bill but do not support the social protocol?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members must decide for themselves whether they are opposed or unopposed, as it is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Can you confirm, Madam Speaker, that it has been past practice that, if a new clause or amendment has been discussed or voted on in the House, it is unlikely to reappear, provisionally or otherwise, as a selected item for debate and Division? That is the case with new clause 43, in the name of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Are you aware that Scotland has been misled by the hon. Gentleman into believing that you would select it for a Division? He said:

"If Opposition parties unite behind the clause, it will carry around 40 votes in the Commons and put the Prime Minister in an impossible position."

Are you aware, Madam Speaker, that few people slept in Scotland last night, faced with the excitement presented by that prospect?

Can you confirm that you will adhere to the usual practice and that you will not select matters for discussion that have already been disposed of? Can you also confirm that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan should not mislead the Scottish people in that way? They are not all as daft as he is.

Madam Speaker: I am utterly charmed that at least one Member of the House supports my selection. Thank you very much.

Mr. Trimble: Amendment No. 2 is couched in the same terms as amendment No. 27, which we considered in Committee. You took the view, Madam Speaker, that new clause 22 and amendment No. 2 were incompatible. When we discussed amendment No. 27 in Committee, the Attorney-General assured the House that it would have no effect or impact on the Bill or on ratification of the treaty. I wonder whether you have received different legal advice which would indicate that amendment No. 2 would have some effect, despite the fact that he assured us that it would not.

Madam Speaker: The only advice that I listen to is advice as to whether amendments and new clauses are in order. After receiving such advice, I have to determine which to select and I have done so. May we now proceed with the Bill?

New clause 42

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

'. A person may be proposed as a member or alternate member for the United Kingdom of the Committee of the Regions constituted under Article 198a of the Treaty establishing the European Community only if, at the time of the proposal, he is an elected member of a local authority.'.
—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.8 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Government amendment No. 43.

Amendment No. 32, in page 1, line 13 after 'representatives', insert

'allocated between England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland as closely as possibly in proportion to the respective electorates.'.

Amendment No. 34, in page 1, line 13, after 'representatives', insert

'selected on a basis which reflects the numerical distribution of MPs from each constituent nation of the United Kingdom'.

Mr. Garel-Jones: During our debates in Committee, it was made clear to the House that the Government would have much preferred not to be tied down by the limitations that are now contained in clause 1, in relation to the Committee of the Regions. However, as I also told the House on 25 February, the Government will now accept the principle that stands in clause 1 of the amended Bill. New clause 42 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, which must be read with amendment No. 43, is not designed to change the principle contained in amendment No. 28, which was moved in Committee. It is designed simply to ensure that our own legislation is drafted to achieve the purpose of amendment No. 28 and no more, and is legally watertight and consistent with our obligations under the treaty.

As a matter of legislative drafting, the change made to clause 1(1) by amendment No. 28 would operate as a proviso, so that title II falls in and out of the definition of "treaties" in the European Communities Act 1972, depending on whether or not United Kingdom representatives were drawn from elected local government representatives. That clearly does far more than the proponents of the original amendment intended —hence new clause 42 transposes the substance to a new clause operating directly on the conditions for appointment to the committee rather than make a legal nonsense of clause 1.

Also, it must be made clearer that the United Kingdom is limiting the category of persons who can nominate for appointment to serve on the Committee of the Regions, not purporting to fetter the council's power of appointment itself. Finally, article 198a of the treaty provides that members and alternate members of the committee shall be appointed for four years. Local councillors also generally serve for four years, but their terms are hardly likely to be congruent. It is possible to read the Bill as drafted as requiring that a person remains a local government representative for the duration of his appointment as a member of the committee.

It would be a breach of our treaty obligations if our domestic law meant that a member of the Committee of the Regions could no longer serve on it once his term as a local government councillor expired. As the treaty provides that the term of office of committee members shall be renewable, we would have liked to be able to renominate an existing member who was making a worthwhile contribution to the committee's work, even if he had ceased to be a local government representative since his appointment to the committee.

That is why the last seven words of new clause 34 as originally tabled last week provided that existing members of the committee could also be proposed for appointment to the committee. However, discussions through the usual channels suggested that that might not be the will of the House, so we have tabled new clause 42 as it appears on today's amendment paper, without that alternative qualification for eligibility to serve on the committee.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): New clause 42 makes it clear that a person may be proposed

"only if, at the time of the proposal, he is an elected member of a local authority."

Are parish councils as well as all other councils included in the definition of a local authority? That seems an important point.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I believe that the definition includes any person who was properly elected under the democratic process to any local government authority in Britain. I am sure that that extends to parish councils but if, in the course of the debate, I have any reason to believe that is not the case, I will inform the House.

Several of my hon. Friends who represent, as I do, English constituencies have tabled amendment No. 34, which seeks to establish representation on the Committee of the Regions on the same lines as in the House. Amendment No. 32 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) takes a similar line.

As I told my hon. Friend on 25 February, it is not realistic that England should have 20 of the 24 seats, leaving four to be divided between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I think that a majority of right hon. and hon. Members, including those of us who represent English constituencies, recognise that this would not be a satisfactory or reasonable way of establishing our regional representation on the committee. As I said in Committee, we want to ensure that all parts of the United Kingdom are appropriately and fairly represented.

4.15 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I welcome the Government's surrender to, or acceptance of—however they would like it to be read—the vote of the House. There was some noise abroad that the Government would not accept their defeat in Committee and might seek to reverse it on Report. I cannot understand why that rumour got around, because the same majority that defeated the Government in Committee—when they were foolish enough to press it to a vote—would defeat them on Report or at any other stage.

I welcome the Government's rewording in new clause 42. As the Minister rightly admitted, this is not the original new clause that the Government wanted to submit. He says that the improvement follows consultation through the usual channels—by which he means, "I refuse to table the original new clause that I was going to suggest to replace the wording of the Opposition amendment." This is a considerable improvement on the original.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not know what point the hon. Gentleman is seeking to make. Clearly he finds it reprehensible for the Government to accept the will of the House, and reprehensible that discussions should then take place through the usual channels in order for the Government to ascertain what those who tabled the amendment were seeking to do, and to comply with it. I do not regard that as reprehensible; I regard it as the proper way of conducting business.

Mr. Robertson: I never suggested that it was reprehensible; I said that it was welcome and surprising that the Government should listen to anybody other than their own echoes. If they are willing to take on board the views of the House in this regard, I hope that they will be willing to look at other subjects and listen carefully to what is being said.

It is entirely welcome—and almost unprecedented—that the Government should consult on these matters and abide by the outcome of that consultation. I have to say, without expressing any undue cynicism, that the

[Mr. Robertson]

Government's willingness to obey the will of the House and listen to consultations has more to do with their fear of being defeated than with the bright new dawning of understanding in the field of consultation.

Let us be merciful, in the circumstances, and welcome what we have got. What we have got is quite significant —a victory for the House of Commons—inasmuch as the Government now accept the principle, which the Minister resisted through debate after debate, that the composition of the Committee of the Regions should be selected from among local government representives and not from that tiny who's who that makes up the Government's own list of respectable nominees to serve on everything from local health boards to the chairmanship of the largest quangos in the country. The Government had to accept that principle, and I am grateful that it is now enshrined in legislation.

Of course, other questions remain to be asked in relation to the Committee of the Regions. The Minister said in his statement—as he said to the House on 25 February—that of course the Government would accept the principle that those who serve on the Committee of the Regions should come from the ranks of elected local government councillors, but can he explain why he sent a letter to the president of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities only a few weeks ago suggesting that the will of the House would be only one of the methods that the Government were considering? If the Government have now accepted the principle, will the Minister say explicitly that they will accept the will of the House and choose only from elected councillors? I see that the Minister is nodding his head, which gives more clarification than his correspondence.

Now that the Minister has had time to consider the import of what has been said, following the Government's defeat, and to consult officials about the rewording of the new clause, may I ask him whether he has had time to think through how the British delegation will be chosen? We believed that it was important to establish here the principle that the Committee of the Regions representatives would be local authority representatives. We did not go beyond that.

Some have suggested that, by refusing to specifiy the method of selection, we have left it open to the Government to choose Committee of the Regions representatives from among the ranks of Conservative councillors—that is, if, after Thursday next, there are still sufficient Conservative councillors left to sit on the Committee of the Regions.

The Government, and especially the Minister of State, will, I know, have given some thought to this question. I hope, therefore, that he will tell us precisely how the Government intend to deal with this matter. Our strong view was that representation on the Committee of the Regions should not be laid down by the House of Commons—that its composition should be decided neither by Government Ministers nor by means of a provision inserted in the Bill.

If we believed in the principle of local government power and authority and the devolution of power to that level, the composition of the Committee of the Regions should be left to the local government associations, which include representatives of all the major parties and which represent all the regions in the country.

Whom does the Minister of State intend to consult? The local government associations have devolved the power to take decisions on many issues to the Local Government International Bureau, which has been engaged in widespread consultations on the subject. It has put forward a number of ideas which it wants to raise with the Minister. Is the Minister of State willing to consult the Local Government International Bureau, with a view to establishing the composition of the Committee of the Regions?

Will the Minister of State ensure that representation of the regions is properly balanced? He said that he was not in favour of the amendment of one of his hon. Friends, which has not been selected for debate, providing for 20 English regional representatives and four representatives for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since the Minister of State rejected that amendment and therefore told us what he is against, can he now, after all the detailed thought that has been put into it, tell us precisely what the composition of the Committee of the Regions is to be and how the regions will be represented? Can we be assured, as the House has the right to be assured, that local government representatives will come from the regions that they are expected to represent?

The Minister suggested that representation will be broken down region by region. Can we be assured that there will be no question of councillors being selected from one region nominally to represent the interests of another? This is not a hypothetical question. Allegations have been made outside the House that there may be some jiggery-pokery in the Government's handling of the issue.

Can the Minister give us some idea of the Government's thinking on the involvement of the political parties in nominating representatives to the Committee of the Regions? If it were thought desirable for the political breakdown to be either by region or nationally, can we be assured that the right of individual political parties to put forward nominees will not be pre-empted and that the Government do not intend to choose representatives from a selected list of representatives, or their own favoured candidates from individual political parties? Those are some of the detailed questions to which I should like the Minister to respond and to which the House has a right to expect answers.

One of the most intriguing and perhaps most mysterious aspects of the debate on the Committee of the Regions is what happened on the night the House came to its historic conclusion, and the involvement of the Scottish National party and the Welsh nationalists. The SNP found itself rather lonely in its support of the Government. The Minister says that it will not regret it, but I have a faint feeling that some members have already regretted it. It was a fateful evening. The Minister lost, despite the new friends that he had gained and, of course, the nationalist parties lost out. We are told that there was a deal. The Minister did not tell us, and I do not know whether he will tell us now——

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robertson: The Minister says no, but that could mean that he is not going to tell us or that there was no deal. However, apparently there was a deal.

The deal for Wales—or the alleged deal for Wales—received much more coverage, seemed much more explicit and had strings attached. It apparently meant that the Welsh nationalist party was to vote in support of the Government from here on in, on 10 o'clock motions, closure motions and the rest. It was to support the Government on everything, although I give credit to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for putting his name to amendment No. 2—that was perhaps the one dispensation that the party was allowed as part of the great deal, which was to ensure that there would be one Plaid Cymru representative on the delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that by voting for Second Reading we showed our support for the principle of Maastricht and our enthusiasm to see the Bill on the statute book to ensure an end to uncertainty for industry in Wales? It is therefore not surprising that we vote for closure motions in order to make progress, but we are certainly not in favour of the social chapter exclusion because we want the social chapter provisions to apply equally in Wales and the rest of Europe.

Mr. Robertson: On the face of it, that sounds terribly reasonable, although the hon. Gentleman is sitting beside colleagues who have a very different point of view. I admit that, to the outside world, what he says seems reasonably plausible, but it does not bear examination against what he and his colleagues have been saying in Wales. They did a deal. They were not going to decide whether a closure motion should be moved after the appropriate period or after the shortest period in which the Government could obtain a closure motion from the Chairman of Ways and Means. The deal apparently meant a slavish devotion to whatever the Government Whip said——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn) *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: I shall give way in a moment. I am still replying to the leader of the hon. Gentleman's party, but I shall give way to other Members, because everyone wants a chance to speak.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): He is the Chief Whip.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend informs me that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) is the Chief Whip, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain. It is not a matter of an assertion or allegation, because we have done the calculation. The Welsh nationalists supported the Government in 52 of the 59 votes on the Bill. The Minister says that that is very good; they will get a gold star from the Government. Clearly their actions were part and parcel of the deal.

I shall come to the Scottish nationalists' deal in a moment. It is a "now you see it, now you don't" deal, but we should have to measure the enthusiasm for Maastricht displayed by the Welsh nationalists, which has led them to vote with the Government 52 times out of 59, against the enthusiasm shown by the SNP——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I have not moved on yet. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that I have not yet come to the Scottish nationalists, but am still dealing with the Welsh nationalists. The deal led the Welsh nationalist party to vote with the Government in 52 out of 59 Divisions. It certainly did not lead the Scottish nationalists to do the same. If the argument is that that was not part of the deal, and was more to do with the Welsh nationalists' devotion to Maastricht, the outside world will not be convinced by it.

4.30 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The hon. Gentleman has done us a great honour. Obviously he has looked at our voting record and thought about it carefully in order to present his argument. May I ask him two relevant questions? First, will he tell the House how many of those votes took place before the amendment on the Committee of the Regions and how many afterwards? He can tell the House whether there was any change in the pattern of our voting. The second question is: how does the hon. Gentleman reconcile his support for the Bill with the fact that he has voted 38 times with the Tory rebels who want to wreck it?

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: Let us deal with those two questions. The first was about votes before and after the amendment, and I believe that we will find that the Welsh nationalist party's devotion to the speedy implementation of Maastricht was concentrated in the period after the amendment was debated. I accept that there will have been some occasions before——

Mr. Wigley: Look at the figures.

Mr. Robertson: We have looked at the figures; it happened on 52 out of 59 occasions. The nationalists north of the border are all telling us that they routinely vote against the Government, although there are occasions on which their devotion to Maastricht overwhelms their devotion to attacking the Government, but we have been told by the Welsh nationalists that the norm is to vote with the Government.

Mr. Wigley: On Maastricht.

Mr. Robertson: On Maastricht and everything to do with it, irrespective of the merits of the individual case, and of whether it makes sense for such votes to take place at 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning. The Welsh nationalists are tied, and we are supposed to believe that that is due to their enduring commitment to the treaty and not to any of the fine print of the deal that they allegedly did.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: Dear, oh dear. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) is making a fleeting appearance. The only other occasion on which I remember his being present for any of the previous debates was when he represented the physical evidence to the House that the Government would not move a 10 o'clock motion one evening. We shall wait a little longer for the hon. Gentleman's pearls of wisdom.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way, having referred directly to me?

Mr. Robertson: I referred directly to the hon. Gentleman only in order to tell him that I would not allow him to intervene at the moment. I know that he usually

[Mr. Robertson]

jumps in at every opportunity when he is mentioned, but I am still attempting to answer the intervention by the Chief Whip of the Welsh nationalist party, who asked me why the Labour party had voted 38 times with the Tory rebels against the Government. We voted against the Government when we believed that the argument against the Government was right. If some Conservative Members cared to join us in the Division Lobby when we had protested at the brevity of some of the debates on key issues, if some Conservative Members wanted to vote with us when the Government sought to carry debates on in the middle of the night, and if some Conservative Members tried to ensure that debates took place at a proper time, they joined us. That displayed divisions on the Government side, not a lack of unity on the Opposition side.

We will continue to vote on issues on their merits. I give notice that if the Government seek to move the 10 o'clock motion this evening we shall consider that unreasonable, in view of the nature and importance of the subjects to be debated. We are not in favour of considering those important issues in the early hours of tomorrow morning.

Mr. Wigley: They want to wreck the Bill.

Mr. Robertson: We are not attempting to wreck anything. Proper sensible debate on the Bill can easily be accommodated within the normal hours of the House.

It is time for me to ask the Minister of State some questions about the alleged deal which received publicity in Wales and which led the Welsh nationalists to support the Government in voting against the principle that the composition of the Committee of the Regions should be made of locally elected councillors. It is important to establish against what the two nationalist parties voted and what they supported on that occasion. They voted in support of the Minister of State, who repeatedly said that he was not willing to accept the principle that the British delegation to the European Committee of the Regions should be made up exclusively of local authority councillors. He said he wanted it to comprise also Government appointees, such as business men. He treated us to the traditional phraseology. He wanted to keep some places for the business men who are jam-packed into every quango that the Conservatives establish. We now have many quangos taking power away from Parliament and local government. That is what the Minister said and that is for what the two nationalist parties voted.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is about to launch into his traditional debate with the Scottish National party and I do not want to intrude on that. It is difficult to know precisely what Opposition Members, such as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who wants to know about the deal, have in mind, because they jump up and down as if a deal was something dirty and dishonourable.

We intend to consult precisely the people of whom the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is speaking. We intend to consult, to listen and to come to arrangements. We intend to come to what are normally called deals.

Mr. Robertson: If that was the beginning and end of it, I would not have to indulge in the part of the speech that I am now making. But we know that there was an attempted deal between the nationalist parties and the Government over a limited aspect of the Government's package. The Government had no intention of consulting anybody except the nationalist parties about the composition of the Committee of the Regions and, had they won the vote that night, the Committee of the Regions would have been jam-packed full of the Government's usual old cronies, friends, partners and business associates.

But it would appear that there was a deal, though not a deal between Her Majesty's Government and local authority associations representing local councillors throughout the land. There was apparently a limited deal on offer to certain political parties at a national level. Some of those who were willing to do such deals are sitting in the House right now. They are willing to give away the principle of non-elected people on the Committee of the Regions in return for some squalid backstairs deal by which their positions would be protected. If the world is to know what the deal was all about and what they got, let the Minister speak now and tell everybody.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There is a point that the hon. Gentleman clearly has not understood since we started discussing the Committee of the Regions. I hope that I made it perfectly clear in Committee that far from being opposed to local government representatives sitting on the Committee of the Regions, we thought that was a likely, indeed probable, event. I also made it clear in Committee that, while we were opposed to tying ourselves down exclusively to elected councillors, we were open to the proposition that the substantial majority of representatives would be local government councillors.

I assure the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—I have never felt it necessary to apologise for what I believe is one of the finer characteristics of the House—that discussions between the Opposition and the Government take place every day through the usual channels. That enables the House to work. So I do not apologise in any way for discussions that we may have had with the nationalist parties. I assure him that the discussions with the Welsh nationalist party were predicated on the understanding that all the representatives would be from local government, and that caused us no difficulty whatever.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before we proceed, may I remind hon. Members that interventions should be brief. The Minister's contribution was more like a speech.

Mr. Robertson: Yes, indeed it was, but it did not say anything—that is the difference. The Minister's contribution was interesting at the end. The Minister of State, who is in charge of the Bill, said that an agreement to base the Committee of the Regions on local government councillors was expected only among the Welsh nationalists. The Minister of State will no doubt say that he did not take part in the other deal—I wonder who did.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am much too prudent to try to intervene on discussions within Scotland, which I left to other of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Robertson: The Minister is here today representing Her Majesty's Government and all those who participated in the behind-the-scenes deals. I make a clear distinction

between the normal discussions that take place between the parties in the House on the running of the House. Last week, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and I discussed whether her name should appear on amendment No. 2, and we reached agreement on that——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): That was a discussion.

Mr. Robertson: Yes, that was a discussion—consultation took place—[HON. MEMBERS: "A deal."] There is a difference——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have lots of contributions, particularly from a sedentary position. We must listen to one person at a time.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): If the hon. Gentleman does not like deals, will he condemn the deal that was taking place between the deputy Chief Whip of the Labour party and the Conservative rebels outside the Chamber just after the statement? Once they saw that they were being watched, they went into a huddle, but initially they were bang in the middle of the Lobby.

Mr. Robertson: Dear, dear, the hon. Lady may not know about huddles, but they are not evidence of deals. We are discussing a conspiracy between two of the minority parties—the two separatist parties—and a unionist Government in order to defeat an Opposition amendment that would have established the important —one might say fundamental—principle that the Committee of the Regions should be composed uniquely of representatives from local government.

There is a clear distinction to be made. There was a conspiracy to defeat the Opposition amendment and support the Government, thereby supporting the Government's view that the Committee could comprise —as the Minister now says—a substantial majority of local government councillors, but could also include others, as the Minister repeatedly made clear throughout our debates, and again today. There was no question of the Minister's accepting the argument that all the representatives would be elected councillors, because there were to have been Government appointees—the words "business man" were continually on the Minister's lips. The question before us that night was whether the Government should have the right to choose from their cronies and not solely from elected councillors. The conspiracy to defeat our amendment was designed to deny the democratic right of local government councillors to represent this country on the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is dancing on a pin. I do not know what the figures are now, but the last time that we discussed the matter, the only countries that had nominated their members to sit on the Committee of the Regions had chosen what I still regard as the more sensible option—to have the opportunity of making some nominations who were not local government representatives. For example, I was lobbied by representatives of the island communities, which was a matter we were considering until the hon. Gentleman's unwise amendment was carried.

Mr. Robertson: As someone who was born on an island, I can educate the Minister. Every island in the United Kingdom is represented by locally elected councillors, who have a mandate, backing and authority. If the Minister is saying that selections would be made from isolated communities, he confirms our worst suspicions. The Minister advanced that argument in the earlier debate and, despite the new friends that he had gained, his argument was overwhelmingly defeated and the principle was accepted by the Committee of the House of Commons —as it will be again this evening—that the Committee of the Regions should be composed of those with a democratic mandate.

4.45 pm

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that the amendment was carried with the support of many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. However, island communities in Britain have an association of their own and they thought it sufficiently important and attractive to come to see me at the Foreign Office to suggest that island communities might have a representative on the Committee of the Regions. Those were the sort of representation for which we might have used any additional places, but, alas, our proposal was defeated. I do not regard it as a huge matter and, as the amendment was carried, we now accept the will of the Committee of the House. The hon. Gentleman must not work himself up into a lather.

Mr. Robertson: I am not working myself up into a lather. The Committee felt obliged to press the amendment to a vote and it voted against what the Minister said because he did not advance a reasoned view about a broad coverage of representation in the Committee of the Regions. The Minister specifically ruled out representatives with a local government mandate—an elected democratic mandate. He said that he wanted to retain places for, among others, business men. The amendment was carried as a principled objection to the Government's maintaining exactly the same selection process as they use in so many quangos. The Minister was not outvoted by the Opposition alone, but lost substantial numbers of friends among Conservative Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before any other hon. Members intervene or the debate continues, I must remind the House that the purpose of the debate is not to conduct an historical review of how we have arrived at this stage, but to debate the merits or otherwise of the new clause currently under consideration.

Mr. Salmond: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your guidance. I do not want to add to the problems of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who has a considerable number already. He mentioned conspiracy twice. Does he remember that the last time that word was mentioned in relation to the legislation was by his hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in the early hours a week ago last Thursday? He alleged that there was a conspiracy between the hon. Member for Hamilton and the Minister of State, with a view to saving the Government's skin on the referendum vote that morning. Was that a conspiracy?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Robertson and ask him to bear in mind my ruling.

Mr. Robertson: Any warning that you give, Madam Deputy Speaker, must be borne very much in mind, and I

[Mr. Robertson]

shall narrowly restrict my answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). There was no conspiracy involved: the Labour party voted for its policy on a referendum—a policy which was established a long time ago—and the Government voted for their policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan are entirely wrong to assume or allege that there was any conspiracy between Front-Bench teams or anyone else on the referendum. The party positions had been established many months in advance.

We are talking about a clear-cut conspiracy relating to new clause 42. Had the Government got their way, and had the Welsh and Scottish nationalists been able to help the Government to victory on the matter, the Government would have won an entitlement to choose anyone they wanted from the British population to represent this country on the Committee of the Regions. We are being told—but not by the Minister of the Crown, who completely denies all knowledge of one of the deals——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already issued a warning to the hon. Gentleman, whose speech is now becoming not only irrelevant, but tediously repetitious.

Mr. Robertson: I am sorry if it appears that way to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall try to select new vocabulary and, in order to stay within your level of tolerance, I shall resist the temptation to give way to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who, during the past few days, has been prayed in aid as a great supporter of the social chapter. However, that would be to pre-empt a later debate.

There was undoubtedly an attempt to preserve the Government's right to select their cronies and the two nationalist parties were part of that.

The House is entitled to some explanation of the detail that lies behind the new clause, especially what the people of Wales were told about the deal with the Welsh nationalists. We were told that Plaid Cymru is to have one of the three or perhaps four seats on the delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Four.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Member for Southend, East says four. Perhaps he knows more than others about the deal.

The Welsh nationalist party obtained only 9 per cent. of the votes in Wales at the last general election, whereas the Labour party obtained more than 50 per cent. How can the deal possibly be defended on the basis of arithmetic or equity? The Liberal Democrat party, with 15 per cent. of parliamentary votes at the last election, is apparently to get one seat on the delegation of four. The real question is how that criterion is to be extended to the rest of the country, or is the Minister of State about to tell us that he knows nothing about that either?

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I do not wish to test the tolerance of the Chair again.

I should like the Minister, not the Welsh nationalist party, which was only one participant in the deal and can deliver nothing at all, to tell the House of Commons precisely what has been agreed for Wales, what is the breakdown between the parties and who is to select the party nominees—will it be the parties themselves or will they have to draw up a sanitised list from which the Secretary of State for Wales or his possible successor, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will choose who will represent the party in the Committee of the Regions? That issue goes to the very heart of the debate and the new clause.

Before the end of the debate, will the Minister seek guidance from his officials about what the Secretary of State for Scotland was up to? Our only evidence of a deal with the Scottish National party—all they got in return for voting with the Government, apart from being cuffed around the head by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland in subsequent Question Times—was a letter addressed to the hon. Member for Moray saying that the Secretary of State for Scotland would try for six seats on the European Committee of the Regions, with no precise breakdown.

We in Scotland have received no further details of that deal. The hon. Member for Southend, East, who is usually knowledgeable about these matters and who is himself close to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, as they share authoritative views that I read regularly in the *Glasgow Herald*, says that there is no deal. However, following the fiasco of that vote, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan wrote in *Scotland on Sunday* that there was a written agreement. He has written to every Scottish nationalist councillor in Scotland saying that there is a deal. In *Scotland on Sunday* he said that the deal stood, irrespective of the fate of amendment No. 28. Of course, new clause 42 is the technical rewording of amendment No. 28. Irrespective of the fate of amendment No. 28, the deal with the SNP stood, but what is the deal? The SNP will not tell us what the deal is or any detail of it, so I am asking the Minister to tell us in all honesty.

We are the House of Commons debating the Bill on Report and the right hon. Gentleman is the Minister in charge of the Bill. Will he tell me, the House and the people of Scotland whether there is a deal and, if there is a deal, what it is? What did the Secretary of State for Scotland offer the SNP that encouraged SNP Members to go into the Lobby that night and vote against an amendment that proposed that the Committee of the Regions should be drawn only from councillors? I shall give way to the Minister if he will tell me what the deal was.

Mr. Garel-Jones: When the hon. Gentleman's own party stops playing silly games with the Maastricht Bill and enters into discussions, as it has not yet done, he will find that the Government are open to listening to his point of view and making any arrangements that emerge from the discussions. Then no doubt, late, last and stumbling at the back of the queue as ever, he may discover what previous discussions have led to.

Mr. Robertson: If the carrot dangled before the Labour party is that if we get into dealing with the Minister we shall do as well as the SNP has done, it is not a very encouraging offer.

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: I am not giving the Minister a second bite of the carrot. Were it his good fortune to live in Scotland, he would know that if there were a deal we should have heard about it, because the only way that the SNP could possibly get off the hook that it has been hanging on would be to tell the people of Scotland what the deal was.

The Welsh nationalists have trumpeted their apparent deal loud and long enough, but we have heard not a whisper from the SNP, for the very good and simple reason—the Minister's silence confirms it—that there was no deal. He enticed them through the Lobby and they got nothing out of it at all. He enticed them to vote against the principle of local government representatives on the Committee——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given the hon. Gentleman sufficient rope. Now he must come back to the point.

Mr. Robertson: You gave me the rope, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it was the SNP which was hanged in the process.

The House has the opportunity to hear what the deal was that persuaded the SNP to do it. We are hearing tiny fragments of the deal. We are debating the Government's new clause enshrining the principle that was forced on them in the House of Commons by one of the key votes in the parliamentary proceedings on the Maastricht Bill. This is our opportunity to hear about deals, if there are any.

The conspiracy appears to have come to absolutely nothing. The principle that we asked the House of Commons to enshrine carried the day without the assistance of the nationalists. This evening, the Minister claims ignorance of one deal and takes pride in another, although he is incapable of explaining what it is all about.

I return to the beginning of my speech by saying that I welcome new clause 42, which enshrines an important principle not just for the House but for democracy in Britain and for a European Committee of the Regions which will have, especially in the British delegation, a democratic legitimacy that will strengthen its worth.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The debate on the Committee of the Regions has been one of the most pathetic examples of the House of Commons trying to pretend that something had importance when it had none whatsoever. I hope that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who has spoken with much vigour and enthusiasm throughout these debates, would tell the people of Britain one simple fact: the Committee of the Regions will have no power to do anything at all; it will have no budget and it will not even have its own secretariat, but will have to share its secretariat with an existing function of the EC.

The fact that the poor old Welsh nationalists, for whom I have always had high regard, appear transformed into pathetic Lobby fodder ever since the strange deal was done makes me wonder about the intelligence——

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose*——

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Minister has been interrupting all the time, holding up our discussions and wasting time, so I shall allow him to intervene only once.

Mr. Garel-Jones: If the Committee of the Regions is, as my hon. Friend says, a matter of such little consequence, why did he find it of sufficient importance to wish to vote with the Opposition on this matter?

Sir Teddy Taylor: This, I am afraid, is rather typical of what we have had from the Minister of State. It is pathetic. When we try to make a point, he asks if we are agreeing with the Labour party or trying to help socialism. I hope that he will not interrupt me again, and I will come back to that specific point. I can remember an occasion when we were talking about the membership of the court and I asked what was the point of giving the court all these powers if there was no way of implementing them, at which point the Minister of State jumped up and asked me if I wanted to give more powers to the European Community. That is the level of debate that we have had from him.

I can only say, as someone who has been here for 28 years and who has no influence on anything at all, that, having been present at many debates, while I have a high regard for the speeches made by the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), which have been well informed, comprehensive and sincere, the Minister of State's participation in the debates has been a disgrace to democracy and to the House of Commons.

5 pm

My point is a simple one. If we are sending people to organisations, of which the European Parliament is a good example, they should be elected. They should have the support of the people of Britain. If we are sending people to any kind of organisation which takes all power away from democracy, we should send elected people who know what they are about, especially if the organisation or committee has the power to spend money. If it has no power to spend money on its organisation, people should appreciate that we are setting up a committee which is almost identical to what they had in the Soviet Union, a huge organisation of people coming from all over the Soviet Union. They sat there in their countless rows and passed resolutions, and other people always came from the Government to say that the representatives were being most helpful and that they appreciated all the wonderful advice that they received from the Supreme Soviet. It was a pathetic organisation.

On the issue of the Committee of the Regions, we should make it clear to the people of Britain what is happening to our country. Democracy is dying, and their opinions on things will no longer matter. We are transferring power to boards, councils and commissions. People's views will be worthless and useless. This is typical of the Committee of the Regions, and I would again challenge the Minister of State, who is such a clever person. I talked about power. Has this committee any power at all? No, it has not. Does the Minister know of any power? What power does it have to do anything at all? A Minister of State who knows everything that there is to know about the European Community should be jumping to the Dispatch Box and saying that he has misled the House and that the committee has power to do this, that and the other. But it has none at all.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I confirm that the Committee of the Regions is an advisory body; but giving advice is not an

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

improper thing to do. It is what hon. Members do constantly. They give the Government advice and the benefit of their opinion. There is nothing wrong with that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: There is a substantial difference if one is making decisions on the structure of the economy and on interest rates, on the welfare of our people, on whether they can have jobs and a reasonable standard of living, on things like the agricultural policy—which is entirely outside the scope of this debate—spending vast amounts of money, as much as £250 million a week, on dumping and destroying food surpluses. People should have some control over these things. But instead of giving the people power we are setting up a whole string of worthless, useless organisations, of which the Committee of the Regions is the perfect example.

Once we have decided to set up a body which has no power and no budget, that body will be able to spend lots of money on organising itself, perhaps holding seminars or going to some of these wonderful hotels throughout Europe for discussions, or paying official visits to Wales, exclaiming how wonderful Europe and Wales are and having a grand time. While democracy is dying, they will be spending the people's money on these worthless, useless Euro-junkets, telling people that they are doing a marvellous job.

As someone who has always admired minority parties, I am not in any way upset about the Scottish nationalists. They were effective for only a short time. Their healthy independence disappeared after what seemed to be a strange, anonymous semi-deal—I very much doubt if there was any deal at all. But something substantial has happened with the Welsh nationalists and those who were decent, honourable people have suddenly changed into pathetic Lobby fodder for the Government. It is appalling. And all they have received is the pledge that they can appoint one splendid person who will be able to go to this worthless Committee of the Regions and be able to exchange flags and cakes and invite people to come over to Wales and have a grand time.

Because the Government, for reasons best known to themselves, have decided to have representatives on this worthless, useless organisation, we must have lots of Welshmen, lots of Scotsmen and lots of goodness knows what. I wonder how Northern Ireland fares in all this. We must ask ourselves whether this is true democracy. If we are to have an organisation which is interested in talking about itself and putting forward resolutions, what about the rest of the country? Have the Government thrown out the baby with the bath water and forgotten other parts of the United Kingdom?

I am in rather a special position because, having been born in Scotland, I represented a Scottish constituency and I now represent an English one. The Government must remember that, while they are wheeling and dealing on these amendments about silly organisations which have no power, they are responsible for the whole of the United Kingdom. When they offer Welsh nationalists a special deal and they, in turn, say how wonderful it is and do what they are told ever thereafter—because they choose to do it—the Government appear to have forgotten their responsibilities to places like Tilbury, which I passed through today, Southend-on-Sea, Birmingham and Yorkshire. But this seems not to matter. They only want to persuade the minority parties to vote for them and so they feel that they can chuck in any numbers that they like.

I find that appalling. It would be infinitely better to have no Committee of the Regions at all and for the Government to save Community money by not sending representatives. If, however, they must go, it is only fair that England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—a place with special problems and outstanding representation in the House—should have fair and reasonable representation which takes into account the population and the problems of the place and not just how many people they can shove into particular Lobbies.

I have been here for 28 years. I have tried not to engage in filibustering or wasting time and I have probably just annoyed people sometimes by the things that I have said, but I feel that there is occasionally a need for troublesome individuals to tell the Government that some Back-Bench Members are being rather sickened by some of the things that are done. The Government obviously want to get the treaty through. They know that the Opposition Front Bench are on their side. But some of the pathetic deals and arrangements that they are making are contrary to democracy, and we would be much better not getting involved at all.

I should like to say a few words about another new clause to which I put my name, one in the name of the Scottish National party, in which representatives of all the parties have come together to say that there is a case for asking the people their view on some things which are rather important. I am not saying that this new clause and what it proposes are the ideal arrangement for a referendum, but I welcome very much indeed the fact that the Scottish National party, for which I have always had a high regard although I have disagreed with its views fundamentally and completely, accepts that there is a case for people giving their views on something. This call for a consultative referendum——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not considering a referendum in this debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am well aware of that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am just trying to say that I appreciate the fact that the Scottish National party has accepted that there is a case for people expressing their views. Long may they hold these views, and let them go from strength to strength in that particular regard.

I repeat: the committee is useless, worthless and ludicrous, and it will cost the taxpayers a great deal. *[Interruption.]* I am appalled that Labour party spokesmen should laugh at this; it will cost our people a great deal of money. They should know that many people in their constituencies are miserable, unemployed and homeless, paying too much tax and having their houses seized—much of this because we are flinging money at the European enterprise. Their attitude to public spending, therefore, is an affront. We have only to remember that the average family pays an extra £18 a week for food and that £500 million a week is spent on the common agricultural policy. There is huge, wasteful expenditure and extravagance, and it is appalling that we are going ahead with a treaty that will cost the people of Britain a great deal more.

I have two simple questions for the Minister. First, what estimate has he made of the cost of the Committee of

the Regions? Whatever estimate he has made will, I am sure, turn out to be an underestimate, not because Governments like to underestimate, but because European projects always turn out to cost much more than we expect them to.

I am sure that the Government have made some sort of estimate; Governments do not agree to these things without doing that first. We want to know everything: will the committee hold conferences and seminars and go on nice little visits to Wales to tell the Welsh nationalists that they are splendid people? So let the Government tell the House, perhaps in *Hansard*, what their estimate is. Then, in six years' time, say, if the wretched treaty has been passed, my hon. Friends will be able to ask Ministers whether the figures were accurate. This will be an educational process for the people of Britain.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Far from finding out what it will cost to run the Committee of the Regions, I am having great difficulty in finding out the purpose of the committee. Looking at the treaty, I have yet to discover what that purpose is. Unless we know the purpose, how can we assess how much money should be spent on it?

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend should be well aware that it has no purpose, beyond allowing a large number of people from all over Europe——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): And Wales.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Certainly. Then they will pass resolutions. It will be almost exactly like the Supreme Soviet, to which people came from all over Russia and passed resolutions. Then people came from the Soviet Government saying, "We want to thank you for your splendid suggestions." I assure my friends from Wales that Ministers, perhaps even from the Foreign Office, will go to the committee and say, "What wonderful advice you have given us. You are giving us progressive and forward-looking ideas. We are more than grateful for them. Please carry on with your good work for Europe and the people of Wales."

This will be, as I say, a pathetic, useless, worthless organisation with no budget of its own—apart from the ability to spend lots of money on itself.

I am sure that the Government will be able to give me information on my second question too. What will people be paid for attending the Committee of the Regions? Will they get nothing, as those who serve on voluntary bodies receive? It would be nice to know. I have not the slightest idea as yet. I am sure that the Minister knows everything about this, and it would be helpful if he told us how much representatives will be paid. Will they receive only an allowance, and, if so, what kind of allowance? Will they be given an allowance for hotels and travel?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Shocking!

Sir Teddy Taylor: I cannot understand why the Minister says that, because it matters to every taxpayer in his constituency and in mine.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not regard it as particularly shocking that if someone goes to Brussels to serve on the Committee of the Regions he might be allowed to stay in a modest hotel. My hon. Friend clearly regards it as wholly reprehensible that the taxpayer should fund that.

5.15 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor: I would have no objection if people who were sent to this ridiculous and pathetic public relations exercise had to stay in modest hotels. I am not arguing about that. I am just asking the Minister what the cost will be and how much people will be paid. Will they stay in modest hotels or in big hotels? Will they travel first or second class?

I have found time and again—I hope that Foreign Office Ministers will bear this in mind—that when Ministers come here to give us assurances or make pledges those assurances turn out to be a load of codswallop. When we agreed to the treaty of Rome, we were told that it was merely a question of freeing trade in Europe—it committed us to nothing. It did not turn out like that.

I believe that our previous, wonderful Prime Minister was partly misled about the Single European Act. She told me that it would merely allow majority voting to be used to encourage free trade ideas. I am sure that she now feels let down, because things have not worked out quite like that. I can remember our present splendid Prime Minister telling us that the exchange rate mechanism would bring us growth and stability. Instead, it brought us unemployment, misery and horrendous costs.

I ask the Minister of State, who has nothing but contempt for the points that I am making, to bear in mind the fact that Ministers—not him, but others—have given us pledges and guarantees in the past which have unfortunately turned out to be largely worthless, to such an extent that our democracy is fading away.

Mr. Marlow: As my hon. Friend is doubtless aware, the Committee of the Regions will adopt its rules of procedure and submit them for approval to the Council, acting unanimously. What it will do, how it will do it, where it will do it and any other aspects of the running of the committee are thus subject to the vote of our right hon. Friend the Minister of State. So if my hon. Friend has any questions for him, I am sure that he will receive a full and complete answer today.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Many organisations have grand ideas and like to talk about them—the women's institute for one—and no doubt they fulfil worthwhile roles. I am always interested to hear what they have to say. In this case, it is pretended that we are setting up some form of regional government along democratic lines. As my hon. Friend points out, it is bogus nonsense.

The Government's conduct in this matter has been terrible. They have persuaded the Welsh nationalists to throw away the healthy independence that minority parties should always have. The Government have also let down the rest of the country by giving special pledges to Scotland and Wales, just because they want the representatives of those countries to vote for measures which they know are a load of rubbish.

This has been a horrible debate. If the Minister of State chooses to disregard all the opinions that I have expressed, I hope that he will at least answer my two questions. If he gives us the figures, in five years' time when he, or perhaps the hon. Member for Hamilton, is Prime Minister, we can ask them questions to find out whether perhaps once again the Minister has been misguided and has underestimated the total cost of this worthless Euro-nonsense.

Mrs. Ewing: It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), the more so since he managed to insult and compliment the SNP within the space of a few sentences. I have a high regard for his attitude to the European Community, in the sense that he at least has been consistent over many decades in political life. When I was a junior member of the body politic in Scotland, he was campaigning against the European Community, but I think that it would be more honest of him to admit that his argument is not really against the Committee of the Regions: it is against the whole concept of the EC. Therein lies the great difference between his attitude and that of the three nationalist parties.

Ever since the hon. Gentleman left Scotland—some people would say that he was sent from Scotland—he has become more and more an adherent of the sovereignty of the Palace of Westminster. Our contention is that sovereignty lies with the people and we will do everything to forward their right to exercise that sovereignty. Again, I do not think that that element is reconcilable between the hon. Gentleman and me.

Some hon. Members have said that they do not believe that the Committee of the Regions will have a great influence on what happens within Europe. Like my party, I believe that it will have a major influence on structural funds. That is of great interest to people in Scotland, particularly when they consider the arguments about article 1 and article 5b, which are important to many of our fragile economic communities, certainly in the north of Scotland. We must bear in mind the fact that eventually the Committee of the Regions will influence the European Parliament and the Commission on aspects of economic life. Therefore, we must not downgrade it.

I hear rumblings already from the Labour Front Bench. Under no circumstances do we see the Committee of the Regions as a substitute for a Scottish parliament or a Welsh parliament, whereby we would have direct representation in the Council of Ministers and in the Commission; indeed, we would thereby increase our representation in the European Parliament. Until we are in a position to deliver parliaments for Scotland and for Wales—the Labour party is in a shaky position here because, given its votes at the last election, it could deliver such parliaments—we will do everything that we can to enhance the role of our nations within the European Community, where we see our future.

Mr. Marlow: Does the hon. Lady see the Committee of the Regions as a means of bypassing the United Kingdom Parliament? Does she see it as a European device for loosening the cohesion within the United Kingdom and being able to deal directly with the individual parts of the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Ewing: As the hon. Gentleman and I serve on the Select Committee on European Legislation, he should know well my strong views about an independent Scotland within the European Community. I do not see the Committee of the Regions offering us the facility to dial Europe direct and bypass Westminster. Sometimes I wish it could. But until such time as we are an independent nation, I see the Committee of the Regions as part of a decentralising process within the European Community, whereby the views of the regions of Scotland and the regions of Wales—we are not saying that Scotland and Wales are regions—can be expressed and whereby they can co-operate with people from other countries and try to influence the decision-making process, just as we come here, as elected Members, to represent not only the views of our constituents, which are of paramount importance, but the principles set out in our election manifestos.

I am conscious, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you do not want a historical review—

Mr. Salmond: Or a hysterical review.

Mrs. Ewing —or even a hysterical review of how we have reached the new clause. However, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) resorted to some unhappy hyperbole in his attack on myself and on my hon. Friends in the SNP and Plaid Cymru. If he wants an explanation of the discussions and consultations which took place, he need look no further than amendment (b) which we tabled to his amendment No. 28 and which he rejected. I will not reiterate all the arguments that I used in that debate, but it was clear that no hon. Member on these Benches was rejecting the principle of elected councillors throughout Scotland and Wales being representatives on the Committee of the Regions.

We were trying to ensure that due cognisance was taken of the mechanisms of nomination and appointment and the mechanism to ensure plurality within our democratic political societies. That amendment was rejected by the Labour Front Bench, which is now agreeing with the new clause. The hon. Member for Hamilton did not deal with the key principles which we regard as underpinning membership of the Committee of the Regions. He did not talk about the mechanisms for nomination or appointment, or for ensuring plurality within our democratic society. I wonder why? Is it because, on 5 March, at the executive meeting of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, a decision was taken on the appointment of three members of the Committee of the Regions and three substitutes? I ask hon. Members to bear that decision in mind when thinking about the plurality of our democratic system.

The president of COSLA, Charles Gray of Strathclyde, is to be a member. [HON. MEMBERS: "Labour"] The senior vice president, Rosemary McKenna of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, is to be a member. [HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."] The vice president, Andrew Tulley of Ettrick and Lauderdale, who is an independent, is also to be appointed. The three alternates were named; they are all members of the Labour party.

Mr. Salmond: Name them.

Mrs. Ewing: I am happy to name them. They are Bob Middleton, the convenor of Grampian regional council —[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Baillie Jean McFadden of Glasgow—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; and Keith Geddes of Lothian—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."] They are all members of the Labour party. Can the hon. Member for Hamilton say whether that is Labour party policy in Scotland on membership of the Committee of the Regions?

Mr. George Robertson: The hon. Lady is reading from a report of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which is not the Labour party in Scotland. The question is whether local government and councillors should decide how the representatives are to be chosen. The hon. Lady must not have been listening, because those are precisely the points that I put to the Minister earlier. Had her party

got its way in supporting the Government, there might have been no councillors representing Scotland or any other part of the United Kingdom because the Minister wanted to keep representation to the Government's cronies—business men and friends of the Government. That is what the Government wanted and what the hon. Lady voted for.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman started digging a hole when he rose earlier and attacked hon. Members on these Benches. He is continuing to dig that hole. He should learn a lesson and stop digging so furiously. I am not reading from a report from the Scottish Constitutional Convention; I am reading from the executive minutes of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities held on 5 March this year. The hon. Gentleman has not done his homework. It is strange that there has been no communication from COSLA to the hon. Gentleman to let him know that, out of six potential members of the Committee of the Regions, COSLA has nominated five Labour members.

In regard to the amendments which were discussed earlier, I wish to make it plain to the House and to anyone else that there was no attempt by the SNP to prevent the appointment of elected councillors to the Committee of the Regions. We attempted to ensure plurality and consultation to prevent the Secretary of State or other parties from appointing placemen. We wanted plurality because there is no point in arguing about democracy if there is to be a system of appointments by the patronage of the Front Benches. We in Scotland must take account of the results in general and local elections. We hope that Labour will eventually realise that we live in a pluralistic society and that it does not have a monopoly on local government in Scotland.

In conclusion, I re-emphasise——

Mr. George Robertson: I hope that the hon. Lady's conclusion will answer the question that has been repeatedly asked—what is the deal? She and her colleagues voted against a Labour amendment which would have left the Government with no flexibility about who it could appoint for the United Kingdom delegation. The amendment stated that delegates had to be locally elected councillors. The Government said that they wanted to reserve places for their cronies. What did the SNP get for voting with the Government against the principle of our amendment? The people of Scotland want to know that. Does the hon. Lady propose to tell us?

5.30 pm

Mrs. Ewing: I have become increasingly depressed by the hon. Gentleman because he has not done his homework. He should look again at amendment (b) which we tabled to his amendment. That was the basis of our consultation and negotiations and it guaranteed plurality among elected councillors in the committee. The hon. Gentleman's amendment allowed the Secretary of State to continue to have the facility to appoint whom he wanted. The hon. Gentleman was allowing the Government to choose and the Conservatives are more likely to choose Brian Meek than Campbell Christie or Rosemary McKenna. Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen were allowing power to reside with the Secretary of State for Scotland. Our amendment (b) fully allowed for accountability and the plurality of our democratic system.

The hon. Member for Hamilton spoke about deals. He is always involved in deals and negotiations. It seems that consultation is acceptable to Labour only when it is involved. If other people dare to discuss with other parties in the House how they feel about issues, somehow or other it is wrong. There were discussions with the Labour party, but it refused to accept the principles that we were propounding.

Labour should not adopt such a pious attitude. Every hon. Member has the right to discuss and negotiate with those in authority to try to obtain the best terms for his constituents and his country. A great deal of hot air has been expended.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ewing: I shall do so briefly.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Lady said that the comments by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) depressed her. Is she depressed by the fact that the hon. Gentleman continually refers to the business community in derogatory terms? Does he not see business men as wealth and job creators who have a part to play in Scotland's well being and perhaps in the committee?

Mrs. Ewing: I do not propose to enter into a debate on an intervention that was aimed at the Labour party. However, many people in our communities have many ideas about the expenditure of structural funds, for example, and they include trade unionists as well as business people. This weekend I had the pleasure of meeting representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress as they passed through my constituency in the march for jobs and democracy. They are doing a fine job. The churches and voluntary organisations should have an input about how our communities develop and how money is spent.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) rightly says, business men and church people are all terribly nice and do good work for everyone. However, the Government's new clause says that representatives will be councillors only, which means that business men and church people are chucked out. I hope that my hon. Friend is aware of what he has been told to vote for. He will be voting for councillors only and excluding business men and church people.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) raised this issue. The councillors that I know in my area are very much in touch with business men, trade unions, churches and voluntary organisations and take serious account of opinions that are expressed to them.

It is unfortunate that the debate about the Committee of the Regions has been marred by attempts to score party political points. We see it as an important sphere of influence for people who represent the diverse areas of Scotland and Wales and the opinions there. We hope that the committee will operate in a European context for the benefit of our two nations as well as all the other nations of the Community.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) was not very persuasive. She conceded that there were consultations between her party and the usual channels in Government. There is nothing wrong with that, but the outcome was that the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends voted with the

[Sir Richard Body]

Government. I suspect that there was some reason for her and her colleagues deciding to give carte blanche to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales to make all the nominations to the Committee of the Regions. I would be rather surprised if the hon. Lady and her colleagues did not obtain some concession in return for a generous offer to the Government.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), on accepting the principle that we adopted in Committee. It was right for the Government to concede that, and wise of my right hon. Friend to back track a little.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) asked whether parish councillors would be eligible to sit on the committee. That is an important question, but I doubt that the answer is in the affirmative, because a local authority is legally defined. I stand to be corrected about that, as on most things, but I think that I am right in saying that a parish council is not a judicially defined legal authority—certainly not in the English courts, although it may be different elsewhere.

There is no difficulty in finding good people to stand for parish councils. In Lincolnshire and in most other counties, people of real ability are willing to sit on parish councils. They may be managing directors, prominent farmers, senior solicitors or senior trade union officials who do not have the time to sit on local authorities but are willing to give time to parish councils. Parish councils contain a great deal of talent upon which to draw, and I shall be disappointed if they are excluded from the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Marlow: Does my hon. Friend agree that, inasmuch as we need a Committee of the Regions, many people who would be valuable participants engage in many other activities? It is those other activities which would make them so good for the committee, but they do not have a great deal of time. However, they would have time to serve on a parish council near their home, although they would not have the time to serve on a county council or a metropolitan authority, which would require much greater commitment.

Sir Richard Body: That must be the case, but a great deal depends on what the Committee of the Regions will do. I shall return to that matter.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State said that he had contemplated representatives from the islands if the original provision had gone through unamended. I suppose that he had in mind the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, for example. Perhaps he would confirm that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Or Gibraltar.

Sir Richard Body: My hon. Friend takes the word out of mouth. I was going to mention Gibraltar. It is not quite an island, but those of us who have had the opportunity to go there in recent months know that there are strong feelings there about the way that it has been treated within the European Community.

It insists that it is in the Community and that it is trying to be communautaire, yet as soon as the single market came into effect on 1 January this year, the borders were closed by the Spanish Government. When I was there a week or two after that closure, it was taking people from both sides four hours to cross the border. That is in conflict with all that was intended by the single market.

Gibraltar is saying that it cannot raise its voice. It has no voice in the House of Commons or the European Parliament. Therefore, might it not have a place on the Committee of the Regions?

Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister would be good enough to tell me whether there is any prospect of Gibraltar having some voice in Brussels. At the moment, it is dependent on the Foreign Office. Whether the Foreign Office is willing to express forcefully and effectively the views of Gibraltar is not for me to say. If it advocates the case for Gibraltar as it advocates the case for this country, I may wonder about what is being said on behalf of Gibraltar.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I compliment my hon. Friend on raising that vital point about Gibraltar not being represented anywhere on any body. Could not the Government, if they wanted to, allocate Gibraltar seats on this funny European Parliament? That subject may be going wide of the new clause, but the Government could, if they wanted to, do something for Gibraltar through the additional seats that have not been parcelled out to particular places but that we must parcel out ourselves.

Sir Richard Body: Indeed. The Government of Gibraltar have made that suggestion to Her Majesty's Government, and are awaiting a reply.

I wonder what France is doing over Réunion, Guadaloupe and Martinique. There is an analogy. It would be interesting to hear from my right hon. Friend what the French Government are proposing to do in selecting representatives for the Committee of the Regions.

As we know, metropolitan France extends across oceans and includes places that are often much poorer than mainland France, and worthy of representation on any Committee of the Regions, but still just as much part of the European Community as Lyon, Paris or Marseilles. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give us some news of what is happening on that score. If France is giving any representation on the Committee of the Regions to those faraway places, we should be doing the same for Gibraltar and, even closer to home, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The case of France and Réunion is interesting, but an even more interesting example is the case of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish areas in Africa, where the people have votes to the European Parliament. Those African areas can be represented on the new Committee of the Regions. Is it not diabolical that areas in Africa that are Spanish can be represented on the Committee, but Gibraltar, which has been in the European Community since 1973—long before Spain ever joined—will be denied such representation?

Sir Richard Body: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The excuse given is that those two parts of Africa are parts of Spain, just as much as Barcelona, while Gibraltar is virtually independent and is not part of the United Kingdom.

We ought to hear a little more from my right hon. Friend the Minister about how seats are being parcelled

out in the other countries. It is obvious, whether or not there is a deal, that Scotland and Wales will have proportionately more than Northern Ireland and England.

Mr. Marlow: Why?

5.45 pm

Sir Richard Body: I also ask why. I do not want to provoke the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), but we should recall why those differences exist. Northern Ireland always used to have fewer Members of Parliament because of Stormont. Not until after Stormont was abolished and Enoch Powell and others mounted a long campaign was representation in Northern Ireland extended to match that of England.

In the meanwhile, Wales and Scotland remained over-represented, because it was more difficult to get around constituencies there. That is no longer the case. The hon. Member for Moray has an attractive constituency, which I visited the other day. I got there much more quickly than I would have got to Boston in my constituency. One can fly to Inverness and get from there to Moray quickly. It takes me about three hours to get to Boston.

I well remember, when my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) represented Glasgow, Cathcart, standing waiting with him at the Members' Entrance. I was amazed to hear that he would get to Glasgow in two hours, when it would take me three hours to get to Boston.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): We have spoken about deals. Is it not a fact that, rather than a campaign waged by Enoch Powell, it was a deal done in Parliament to keep a Government in position for a little while longer that resulted in extra seats for Northern Ireland?

Sir Richard Body: I remember that. The hon. Gentleman is right. A deal was done. It was a necessary deal, and it gave Northern Ireland representation, as it was entitled to, on the same basis as that for England. That only reinforces my point. Northern Ireland and England are treated the same, and rightly so, but I do not see why Scotland and Wales should be treated more favourably than Northern Ireland, particularly when it comes to the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Gentleman might not find it so difficult to understand if, instead of representing the sort of constituency that he represents with such distinction, he represented a constituency such as mine, which, although it has a mere 32,000 electors—less than half the national average—covers an area of 2,800 square miles. Not even the miraculous modern transport systems will allow one to get around that in one day.

Sir Richard Body: I have travelled from Inverness to Scourie, almost to the far end of the hon. Gentleman's constituency, at a tremendous speed because the roads were quite empty. I had a delightful holiday when I got there, and I have envied him his constituency ever since. If he would like to exchange his constituency—but it is not for me to make the offer.

I emphasise the point, because the other countries in the Community will not resort to regional weighting. I doubt whether some parts of France will have greater representation than others. I doubt whether the länder in Germany will allow some to have more than others, or whether the northern Italians will allow southern Italians, about whom they have strong feelings at the moment, to have more representation. Throughout the rest of the Community, representation will be proportionate to population.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to confirm that, because we should by now know what proposals other member countries are making.

Mr. Marlow: Another important point that my hon. Friend is probably about to come to is the fact that the United Kingdom has an allocation of 24 members for the Committee of the Regions, but Belgium, which I understand has one fifth of the population of the United Kingdom, has an allocation of 12 members—one fifth of the size, half the number. If there is to be a Committee of the Regions—many of us are not completely happy with the concept—why should each Belgian be two and a half times as heavily represented as each member of the United Kingdom?

Sir Richard Body: Poor old England will come off worst of all. That is bound to be the case, because we shall be giving proportionately more to Scotland and Wales. They will be much the same as the Belgians, whereas we in England will have to have a reduced number to enable that to come about.

That is of some importance, because I believe that we shall hear much more of the regions with regard to England. Those of us who have argued about the effect that the single market will have upon our economy have repeatedly said that we shall see a steady drift of industry away from all parts of the United Kingdom, including England and the south-east, to what has been called the golden triangle or what is nowadays being called the red banana—that banana-shaped area based on the Rhine, to which industry is now being attracted. We shall see the de-industrialisation of England continue and unemployment continuing at a high level.

Whether or not we adopt the social chapter, we shall find it more difficult to attract industry from the mainland of Europe. All parts of England will suffer the regional malaise that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have suffered for decades. That being so, it is wrong that England should be less well represented than those other regions of Europe which will be similarly affected and which may be outside the golden triangle or the red banana. Therefore, I regret the way in which the Government have done a deal with Opposition Members.

Sir R. Moate: I have listened most carefully, but I am puzzled about why it should be of any concern to my hon. Friend, me or anyone else whether the English regions have X-plus or X-minus members on the Committee of the Regions. I have listened to many debates on the subject, and I have heard no evidence that such a committee will be anything more than a talking shop, having virtually no influence on anything. What difference does it make to us whether we have 100 members or one?

Sir Richard Body: It is convenient that my hon. Friend should say that, because it enables me to go on to make what was my last point. That is that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East are remarkably naive

[Sir Richard Body]

about the European Community. Both should remember what was said in the early 1970s about what was then called the consultative assembly.

Sir Roger Moate *indicated assent.*

Sir Richard Body: I am glad to see my hon. Friend nodding his head. That assembly is now called the European Parliament. Of course, it is still not quite a Parliament, but it will get there given the chance.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): This is the second Chamber.

Sir Richard Body: Yes indeed.

In 1996, we are due to have another intergovernmental conference, and all those institutions will acquire more powers and greater strength. That will include the Committee of the Regions. That is why I believe that the committee will be extremely important.

To use a rather tired old phrase, the Committee of the Regions is just the thin end of the wedge, just as the consultative assembly was the thin end of the wedge way back in the 1950s, when it was first established by the treaty of Rome.

Those of us who were federalists in those days—I must confess that I was—always knew that we would never achieve our objective in one move; it had to be done gradually. One reason why I departed from the federalist camp and ceased to be a federalist was that I felt that it was deceptive. It was always assumed that we would never get where we wanted in one move. Over the years we have seen a steady move towards federalism and the Committee of the Regions is one part of that move, just as the consultative assembly was to evolve into the supreme Parliament of western Europe.

Sir Roger Moate: My hon. Friend might be right: this committee might be the thin end of the wedge. That is the explanation of the support give to it, understandably, by all the nationalist parties. But if so, is that not even more reason to oppose the concept of only elected councillors being selected for membership of this regional council? Is it not that kind of thing that is designed to confer legitimacy; to build up the pretensions of such a committee? If my hon. Friend is fearful of it being the thin end of the wedge, surely, contrary to the way in which he introduced his speech, he should oppose the new clause and allow us to retreat to the position of nominated business men and other worthy people serving on the committee.

Sir Richard Body: That is a persuasive intervention. I might have to reconsider how I shall vote. I do not wish any democratic legitimacy to be accorded to any institution of the Community. However, I must concede that I am attracted by the idea of regionalism. I say that with great regret, because I do not wish the powers or status of this House to be diminished in any way.

But once we have ratified Maastricht, we shall have taken a step which will have so lowered the position of this House that we shall need to consider deeply which way we go from there. We shall have to have some kind of regional assemblies. We cannot have any true democracy or any sense of public accountability if more and more power is to go to the European Parliament, as it will after 1996 and the next intergovernmental conference. At that point, we shall have to recognise that we shall have to have a large number of regional assemblies, and the Committee of the Regions will have to be considerably beefed up after 1996.

Anyone who has studied the development of the Community knows perfectly well that this is just the first step. There is no strong regional authority to begin with. Powers are not given to the Committee of the Regions immediately. The idea is simply introduced to get people used to it. People are then elected to it who start to enjoy the journeys to Brussels, or wherever it may be, and being paid accordingly. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East was rather light-hearted about the cost——

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Minister of State was light-hearted, not me.

Sir Richard Body: That is much more likely.

We now know that the average Member of the European Parliament costs us £500,000 a year. Perhaps a member of the Committee of the Regions will cost £100,000 a year. It is not unreasonable to assume that their total emoluments and expenses will be one fifth. However, I must not digress into the area of expenses.

Mr. Marlow: Does that £500,000 include the cost of interpreters and the running costs of the institution as well as a Member's expenses and emoluments?

Sir Richard Body: No, the cost of the European Parliament is much more than that. The expert on that subject is sitting on the other side of the House. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) knows that it has always been a great deal more than that. The pantechnicons moving the papers around the capitals cost more than that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will not continue with that theme. A passing reference is one thing, but total consideration of that point would be out of order.

6 pm

Sir Richard Body: I was tempted, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I must resist temptation.

I had made my point—that this is the beginning, starting with a form of regional authorities. I concede that, after Maastricht, they may be necessary—but I shall continue to oppose the treaty, because I do not want us to go that route. If we are to move towards a federal structure —as we are, whatever we may choose to call it—we will need committees established across the whole Community to represent each region. Equally, the regions themselves will need their own institutions.

If one is attracted by the argument for regionalism, as I know some Opposition Members are, it could be argued also that the sooner we recognise that case the better, and that that is the only democratic route for the Community to take. That is an attractive argument and, if the treaty is duly ratified, will probably be the route that I shall take. However, I shall much regret having to change my mind and to concede that the House will lose many more of its powers than it will anyway lose under the treaty.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In the debate on the Committee of the Regions in Committee, the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party voted in favour of elected local

authority representatives being appointed to the committee. It is only right to place on record our appreciation for the new clause tabled by the Government this afternoon.

Several references have been made to deals made at the Committee stage between the Scottish and Welsh nationalists and the English Conservatives—all kinds of deals. Those of us from Northern Ireland—I note that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is in his place—are beginning to think, given that so many deals have been made by the Scottish and Welsh nationalists with the Government, that there will be hardly any seats left on the Committee of the Regions for Northern Ireland.

Unlike Scottish and Welsh nationalists, we are not open to deals on the Maastricht agreement because it means something much more important than just a few seats on the Committee of the Regions. It will mean surrendering many of the powers of our national Parliament, a common European defence and security policy, a common European currency and a central bank. Those major issues are not negotiable with Ulster Unionists just to secure a few seats on the Committee of the Regions.

Nonetheless, as there is to be that committee, and as the Government have decided that elected representatives shall serve on it, we must put down our marker so that Northern Ireland is fairly represented. What does the Minister consider to be fair representation for Northern Ireland? He has done deals with parties in other parts of the United Kingdom and we would like to know what is deemed to be fair representation for Northern Ireland. It is often argued that Northern Ireland's various political parties should be represented. As the Social Democratic and Labour party receives only 20 or 21 per cent. of votes in Northern Ireland, or 25 per cent. in a European election, Northern Ireland would need four seats on the Committee of the Regions for the SDLP to secure even one seat. If Northern Ireland representation is reduced to three seats, I fear that the SDLP will not be represented at all. I want to know whether Northern Ireland is to have four full members and four alternate members appointed to the committee.

As to the United Kingdom's overall representation on the committee, that should not be on a pro rata basis according to the United Kingdom's population, but should relate to those regions that receive moneys from the European regional development fund. That would naturally restrict the size of England's representation, but Northern Ireland would, pro rata, have more representation because it is an area of first priority for European development funding.

The problem for Northern Ireland in appointing elected representatives to the Committee of the Regions is that it does not have elected local government. Although Northern Ireland has 26 district councils, their powers are limited to the lifting of the bins once a week, the provision of cemeteries, and certain small tourist projects. Otherwise, all the major local government services of Northern Ireland are controlled by the English Secretary of State and his English Ministers, who come to Stormont once a week to govern us. Those Ministers have full powers in respect of roads, sewerage, water, and planning.

Mr. Mallon: It might be wise at this point for the right hon. Gentleman to state why local government in Northern Ireland does not have the power that people would like it to have. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will explain that it is due to the way in which his party abused power when it had it, to the extent that it had to be removed. Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if there is a Committee of the Regions, it will be a good thing for the north of Ireland, in that whoever is appointed from local government might be subject to outside influences that could be reflected in the councils on which they serve —especially Belfast city council, which is dominated by the right hon. Gentleman's party?

Mr. Taylor: I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would not want me to be tempted down that path. I shall stick to the facts. Major local government services in Northern Ireland are controlled by this Parliament and not by elected Northern Ireland councillors. Education, health, social services, roads, planning, housing, sewerage and water are all controlled by people who were not elected in Northern Ireland, yet who exercise total power in relation to those services.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has no say in those matters and nor have his district councillors. Regrettably, the hon. Gentleman wants to keep the nationalist people of Northern Ireland in a position in which they have no say in the Province's local government affairs. We have local elections in Northern Ireland at the moment and I am sure that the people of Northern Ireland will have heard the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh remark that he does not want them to have real power.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Surely the right hon. Gentleman does not want to mislead the House and to go on record as saying that the Ulster Unionist party dominates the city hall, when it accounts for fewer than one third of the council's members. No party dominates the city hall. It is important to retrieve proper power and for the people of Northern Ireland to elect their own representatives.

Mr. Taylor: As I said earlier, I do not imagine that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, want me to go down that path. However, the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. M. Smyth) is correct. I believe that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh was being a little flippant in the way in which he made his case during his intervention.

In Northern Ireland, the main government services that benefit from the European regional development fund are controlled not by elected councillors in Northern Ireland but by the Northern Ireland Office and its Ministers. Therefore, elected representatives from the district councils representing Northern Ireland on the Committee of the Regions will not have the same important role to play as elected councillors from elsewhere in the United Kingdom—in England, Scotland and Wales—unless we get real democratic local government powers in Northern Ireland.

We must transfer back to the locally elected representatives the real issues that benefit from European regional development funding—in other words, roads, sewerage and water must be transferred back to the elected councillors—so that they can represent the people on the Committee of the Regions in Brussels and can argue their corner to obtain European regional development funding for these major infrastructure projects.

Mr. Wigley: If I understand correctly, the right hon. Gentleman's argument is that representatives from Northern Ireland will not have as much clout as

[Mr. Wigley]

representatives from England, Scotland and Wales. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the argument put forward in Brussels recently that the United Kingdom representatives will not have as much clout as representatives from Germany or Spain? The representatives of those countries are representing elected Governments; our councillors must compete with, perhaps, former Prime Ministers of Bavaria in arguing the case that the right hon. Gentleman puts forward. Is not that a case for an elected assembly or parliament in Northern Ireland to give even stronger clout to those who go to Brussels to argue the case?

Mr. Taylor: That is an entirely different subject. We are talking about the Committee of the Regions and debating a proposal that the membership of that committee should be made up of elected councillors, elected members of local authorities. That is the issue.

I am saying that those who are elected to district councils in Northern Ireland have very limited powers compared with those elected to councils elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The European regional development fund, to which the Committee of the Regions is related, gives major grants for structural and environmental projects in which district councils in Northern Ireland have little or no say.

For example, a constituent came to me at the weekend to complain about a pothole on the Cairnshill road in Castlereagh borough. I cannot go to the district councillors to ask for the pothole to be filled, because they are not allowed to fill in the pothole. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said, they would discriminate in how they filled it up. He said that they are not capable of filling up a pothole—that is his argument—so we are left with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as the only person with the right to decide whether that pothole is to be filled. That is a ludicrous situation which must be rectified. Until it is, the district councils who represent Northern Ireland on the Committee of the Regions will not have the same status and responsibilities as those from elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) mentioned the question of expenses for the members of this new Committee of the Regions. I suspect that it is going to be a committee somewhat similar in its role to that of the Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. The members of that committee—which represents the social partners in the trade unions, business and industry—receive expenses, and rightly so; they have to travel to Brussels and stay overnight there and it is an expensive city. The Minister should give the House some guidance on this—obviously he cannot tell us exactly what the allowances and expenses will be for members of the new Committee of the Regions—and tell us what the present levels of travelling expenses and attendance allowances are for members of the Economic and Social Committee; we will then be able to draw our own conclusions because the allowances will be somewhat similar for the Committee of the Regions.

Finally, I come to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Southend, East—that the Committee of the Regions is simply a consultative committee: powerless and, to a certain extent, a lot of nonsense. That is true. We already have an elected European assembly at Strasbourg—now renamed the European Parliament—with elected representatives from the 12 countries of the European Community. Within that Parliament, there is the European Regional Policy Committee, consisting of elected members of the European Parliament from all 12 Community countries, which meets on a regular basis at least once a month, and elected representatives from Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and elsewhere in the Community deal with regional policies. The committee is consulted by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers and expresses the views of the elected representatives of the regions on specific regional policies. Will the Minister explain adequately—he failed to do so in Committee—what gap the committee will fill in the consultative procedure, and in the whole evolution of regional policy in the Community, which is not already filled by elected representatives in the European Parliament who sit on the Regional Policy Committee?

6.15 pm

Sir Roger Moate: The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) concluded on a very powerful note indeed. He demonstrated that there is no answer that the Minister can give. The answer is clear: this committee is unnecessary. The point that the right hon. Member made about the flaw in the logic of the argument as applied to Northern Ireland is equally a strong argument, but I think that we can apply that logic to many of the features of the argument about whether we have locally elected councillors and whether that is an appropriate qualification.

I disagreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) when he congratulated the Government on having accepted the will of the House and suggested that we should support the new clause. I do not believe that the House should accept it. I find it extremely difficult. I have heard very few arguments from my right hon. Friend the Minister with which I have agreed, but when he argued against this proposition in Committee I agreed with him. He was very persuasive and powerful. Now I have great difficulty when he comes before the House and asks me to accept the opposite argument. I do not change as readily as that. He was persuasive before and I accepted his previous argument. I think that the House, too, should accept that logic.

Mr. Garel-Jones: What I was seeking to do in Committee, when my hon. Friend and other hon. Members intervened, was demonstrate the choices and dilemmas that lay before us. For example, I said that I thought that England ought to be entitled to 20 seats, but that, on the basis of some of the bids that we had received from other parts of the country, England would get none at all. I said that that was a ludicrous position, and that a balance had to be struck.

I see the point that my hon. Friend is heading towards. As an English Member, I would not want to see—anxious as I am to see that Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are properly represented—England squeezed down to the point where it would worry him and me.

Sir Roger Moate: I am not sure that I agree with my right hon. Friend on that point, or whether it matters terribly if England is squeezed down. I accepted the Government's powerful argument that there was no logic in having elected councillors appointed and that we should

have worthy, powerful and influential people from all parts of the Community sitting on this committee—if there had to be such a committee. Now my right hon. Friend is asking the House to say that that argument no longer applies and that representatives have to be elected councillors.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Let me make it clear to my hon. Friend that the Government would still prefer to retain the flexibility for this and future Governments to allow representatives from the business community, as my hon. Friend and others have suggested, to be part of our team on the Committee of the Regions. That is the position which the Government would have preferred. The House chose to prefer a system relying entirely on elected councillors, and the Government must bow to the will of the House.

Sir Roger Moate: I understand that point, but I disagree with it. I challenge the suggestion that, somehow, the will of the House is expressed by a single vote in Committee. It is a novel proposition. Do the Government intend to accept it in future? If they are defeated in Committee upstairs or on the Floor of the House, will they say, "The House has spoken; that is the will of the House; we accept it."? Will they make no effort to overturn that decision on Report, or in another place?

The will of the House, as we understand it, is expressed ultimately in the legislation that we enact, which involves a number of stages. The will of the House is not expressed simply in Committee. What my right hon. Friend should have done was to say, "All right, we accept that we were defeated in Committee, but we shall reverse that decision on Report." We have such an opportunity now.

Mr. Garel-Jones: If my hon. Friend were able—I must admit that my efforts to do so failed—to persuade some of my right hon. and hon. Friends to reverse their view and support what I believe is my hon. Friend's view, which is also the Government's view, I am sure that the Government would seek to do what he suggests. I am afraid, however, that my advocacy failed. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has any good news for me.

Sir Roger Moate: I have seldom known my right hon. Friend to be in such a flexible mood: to be so anxious to accept a majority verdict and not to challenge it. Alas, I can offer my right hon. Friend no more than my own vote. No doubt he and I will be in the Lobby together to vote down the new clause. That, at least, is the logic of the argument. Further efforts should have been made to overturn the Committee's verdict.

I object in principle to the concept that appointment to the Committee of the Regions—its members will be appointed, for there is no new mechanism, as has been pointed out, for electing them—should be restricted to elected councillors. They do not even have to represent the region from which they come. Although I am delighted that there will be no regional elections, the horrible logic of all this is that if there is to be a Committee of the Regions and only locally elected councillors are to serve upon it, they ought to be elected to that committee. Such a proposition would be welcomed by the nationalist parties, or the minority parties, or the regional parties, however they may choose to be described. However, that is no part of the proposal, and I am pleased about that.

What I object to, in all logic, is the idea that election to a local council is, somehow, a relevant and necessary qualification for service on an appointed committee, an advisory and consultative committee, of this sort. What magic divinity is conferred upon a district councillor from, shall we say, the excellent borough council of Swale in my constituency that justifies his appointment as the British representative for a region that is called, for the sake of argument, the south-east of England—Kent, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, and perhaps Greater London?

The appointment of a Conservative Swale borough councillor, no matter how superb he might be, will not be accepted by Labour councillors in Essex, just because that man has been elected to Swale borough council. It does not mean anything.

One is elected to represent one's parish council, district council or constituency. That confers some rights within the area, but it does no more than that. It confers neither the status nor the credibility to represent the United Kingdom, or a large region of the United Kingdom, in Brussels. There is no logic, there is no sense, in that argument.

Mr. Gallie: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend says. I agree also with the comments of the Minister, who has to deal with the practicalities of the issue. If I may add to my hon. Friend's argument, I find it difficult to understand how local authority representatives, who frequently complain of the burdens of their local authority involvement, will be able to take on their shoulders this weighty exercise of travelling regularly to Brussels to take part in the deliberations of the Committee of the Regions. Can my hon. Friend comment?

Sir Roger Moate: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I suspect that it will not be difficult to find local authority representatives who will be willing to go to Brussels. It will be a sacrifice for them, but I suspect that there will be some compensation. Their expenses will not be too inadequate. The influence and the status that will be conferred on them will be considerable. People will listen to their words. I suspect that, somehow, they will manage to tear themselves away from their borough council duties in order to spend time elsewhere. I do not think that that will be a problem.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend again, but his remarks provide me with the opportunity to respond to a question that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and other hon. Members asked regarding expenses and costs. Members of the Committee of the Regions receive no salary. They receive a per diem of approximately £100 a day, plus their travelling expenses. As for the costs of the Committee of the Regions, members of the committee will use the services of the existing secretariat. They will also use the buildings that the Economic and Social Committee occupies. There will be some additional administrative and personnel expenses, but we do not expect them to be too substantial.

Sir Roger Moate: I am sure that the House will be most grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said about the position at the beginning. Can he tell us that that state of affairs will continue for the next five, 10, 15 or 20 years? I

[Sir Roger Moate]

just wonder what the rewards might be in the years to come. The point is taken, however. I do not intend to labour the expenses point.

My right hon. Friend will find that locally elected councillors feel that they have gained considerable influence and stature as a result of going to Brussels to sit on the Committee of the Regions—influence and stature which, I suggest, is far beyond what is justified by the powers that they exercise. The real danger is that this committee has no responsibility but great influence. Its position is one of total irresponsibility—the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages. The committee will have no responsibility, but, due to its great status, it will be able to lecture the Strasbourg assembly, Brussels and us and urge us to spend, spend and spend.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend talks about the committee's status. Will its members have some title or designation? Will they be known as regional councillors? Will they have initials after their name? A more substantial point is that we have got it the wrong way round. We ought to know what this organisation is doing before we establish it. If it is not doing housing, education, social services and those things that are done by locally elected councillors, what on earth is the point of sending locally elected councillors to sit on that committee?

Sir Roger Moate: My hon. Friend makes his point in his own way. It was dealt with effectively by the right hon. Member for Strangford, who asked the same fundamental question: what on earth will this body be doing that is not already being done by properly elected Parliaments? I have, with regret, to include the Strasbourg Parliament, which I wish was not directly elected. The direct election factor to the Strasbourg Parliament conferred legitimacy on that body. It is a dangerous trend. It was the conferment of democratically elected status on the European Parliament that enhanced that concept of the European federal state. Therefore, I worry about the thin end of the wedge in this case—the conferment of legitimacy on the Committee of the Regions representatives.

My final point is linked to the one that I have just made. I object strongly to the Committee of the Regions being there at all. I accept that we are debating the qualifications of the people who are to be appointed to the committee, but the status of the Committee of the Regions will be deliberately enhanced by the fact that its representatives are elected. The two arguments are inseparable. It is right, therefore, to argue in this debate strongly against the Committee of the Regions and to vote down the new clause.

I am surprised that a Conservative Government and Conservative Back Benchers should argue in favour of something called a Committee of the Regions. I never believed that I would hear such an argument. Why? First, because the Conservative party and this Government have always fundamentally opposed the concept of regional government. I am not talking about Scotland or Wales, but I am certainly talking about England. We have opposed the proposals, especially those made by the Liberal party, for elected regions. We have opposed them for a variety of good reasons, but we are now accepting, almost automatically as a good thing, the Committee of the Regions for the whole of the European Community and for our country. That is very dangerous, so why are we accepting it?

6.30 pm

Secondly, is it not the case that we are opposed to other bodies bypassing Westminster? Without a shadow of a doubt, the Committee of the Regions is designed to do just that. It is in its very nature. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The Scottish nationalists say, "Hear, hear"—we do not have to prove the point because their support does that. The committee is designed to bypass Westminster, yet the Conservative Government are going along with it. Perhaps the committee will be merely an empty talking shop and we are setting up an empty consultative body. Even so, we should still oppose it, but we are apparently saying that it is a good thing and such a good thing that only elected councillors should sit on it.

It could be argued that we do not believe in the committee at all and that it is merely the price that we have to pay for the Maastricht treaty. When I suggested that to the Minister of State in Committee, he said that that was not so and that we believe in it. He said that it was a good thing and that we welcome it. Perhaps it is something in which my right hon. Friend believes, which the rest of the party does not like very much, but with which it has to go along for the sake of the deal in Europe. That would at least be consistent with the rest of the argument over Maastricht: most of the party does not like it, but it is the price that we have to pay to settle the big deal for which the Minister of State is waging a valiant and powerful intellectual fight by himself.

The Committee of the Regions is alien to the Conservative party's usual philosophy, and I object to it strongly. It is not a matter of doing things for the regions —there are other mechanisms for that through national parliaments and elected bodies. The committee is nonsense and rubbish. The new clause may tidy it up, but that merely makes it tidier rubbish which we should not accept.

I should dearly like to believe that we could have cut the committee out of the treaty. We cannot, but we can reject the new clause and eliminate the pretensions that the committee might gain by having elected councillors. We shall not then confer on this consultative body a legitimacy which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said, would represent the thin edge of the wedge, which would ultimately lead to regional government underpinning the federalist ambitions of many hon. Members and many in Europe.

Mr. Maclennan: The contributions of the hon. Members for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) and for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) have revealed a number of inconsistencies among the Adullamites of the Conservative Members below the Gangway. It has been interesting to hear them contradict each other about the potential importance of the Committee of the Regions.

I have no doubt that the committee can become extremely important; I have less doubt about advocating that it should do so. As the European union develops, it will become more natural for parts of that continent-wide political organisation to find common interests being expressed by different parts of Europe which are not always reflected in the historic national communities which are represented directly through the Council of Ministers. Indeed, there is already more in common, for

example, between the fishermen of Brittany and Jutland and of my constituency in the north of Scotland than between the fishing interests expressed by national Governments represented in Brussels in the Council of Ministers when they have sought to determine the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify how the Committee of the Regions could assist the fishermen to whom he refers, given the powers that it has?

Mr. Maclennan: I believe that it will help to focus on the practical consequences of proposals that are being made by, for example, the European Commission for regulations or directives which may affect their interests and which are not necessarily priorities for national Governments but which are priorities for the affected sectoral and local interests.

One has only to consider the debate about whether the highlands and islands of Scotland should be included in the objective 1 status for the purposes of assistance with structural development to recognise that there are, even now, issues of the greatest importance which it is difficult to get on to the agenda of the Council of Ministers because they are of regional but not national interest. Where there are allies to be found at regional level, the case for getting them on to the agenda of the Council of Ministers can be enormously strengthened. I hope that the Committee of the Regions will grow not only in influence but in authority and real power.

Mr. Bill Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is always courteous.

If Scotland, for example, is to be treated as a region, does he accept that its representatives would not necessarily agree that the highlands should be the only part of Scotland to fall into the category to which he referred? Other parts of Scotland may be just as disadvantaged as the highlands, so that there may not be a unanimous view among the Scottish group.

Mr. Maclennan: It would be presumptious of me to look into that crystal ball, although I believe that the highlands and islands' special needs and problems have, on the whole, been recognised across the political parties and throughout Scotland, if not always by central Government at Westminster. I think it probable—I go no further than that—that elected representatives drawn from local authorities would always understand the peculiar needs of the geographical half of Scotland which is the highlands and islands. That is only speculative, and I am dealing with a more institutional point.

Should the committee have an important role? The Adullamite's view is that anything which enhances the effectiveness of the Community is not to be welcomed. Clearly, a body that draws its legitimacy in part from the fact that its membership, although appointed by the Government, has legitimate democratic roots is to that extent strengthened. Indeed, it is entirely consistent with the view of the hon. Member for Faversham who, although he has not exercised power over these matters in two decades, has nevertheless sought to exercise influence and is listened to with respect because his principles have been shining clearly during that time.

I hope that the committee will derive benefit from having a membership drawn from people who have subjected themselves to the arbitrament of election. That gives people a degree of authority in affairs of state, a right to be listened to with some respect, which those who have simply been plucked out of the list of the great and the good by the Government of the day cannot possibly hope to enjoy.

Let me draw an example from close to home. At the general election I was opposed in Caithness and Sutherland by a Conservative candidate who had not stood for election before, certainly not to Parliament, and, if my memory does not mislead me, had not stood in a local government election either. Within a matter of months the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that if the northern unit of the Highland health board was to be established by the wish of those currently involved in running it, he had it in mind to appoint my Conservative opponent as its chairman; no doubt he was on the Secretary of State's list of the great and the good.

That is an issue of patronage. That is how the Government have proceeded for more than 12 years, and it causes some resentment. I have a great regard for my Conservative opponent, who is a man of sense in many matters, and a man of high public spiri' —but he has not succeeded in being elected. Many people who have been involved in running hospital affairs in my constituency and in the rest of Scotland have stood for election and have been elected. It seems to me perverse that those people should all have been bypassed in favour of somebody who has not been elected, and it also undermines that person's authority. It does not strengthen the unit that is being set up.

I cite that local example in support of the case for appointing representatives from among those who have been elected, as the new clause specifies. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)——

Sir Roger Moate: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to his example of the health authority? We can all think of similar arguments from other parts of the United Kingdom. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would not object so strongly to someone's being appointed to such a post if that person had been officially elected to any body? Would he prefer such a person to be a business man, for example, or to be someone else who had been taken from the community and appointed to chair the health authority? Rather than drawing an analogy with a defeated candidate, is it not fairer to compare an elected councillor with another leading, but non-elected, person in the community?

Mr. Maclennan: I do not think that people have to be either councillors or business men. Many of the most effective councillors I know are extremely effective business men in their own right. The field would not be seriously narrowed.

Mr. Garel-Jones: May I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate)? The option that the Government would have preferred would have allowed for a substantial number of elected local government representatives, but we should not have been alone in the Community in our wish to keep a proportion of the representation so as to enable business men and environmentalists, for example, and representatives of other interests to serve on the Committee of the Regions. Other countries have so ordered their affairs.

I do not believe that there is a great issue of principle at stake here; it is a matter of judgment. Our judgment was

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

that it was not the wisest course to tie down future British Governments and restrict them solely to elected local government representatives.

6.45 pm

Mr. Maclennan: I simply disagree with the Government's initial analysis. I may be revealing my hand when I say that I want the Committee of the Regions to develop, and that if it developed into a second chamber of the European Parliament I should not find that unwelcome. I have always taken the view that a Committee of the Regions could well develop into a senate of the European Parliament. That idea is in the back of my mind, and that is the direction in which I wish to see the committee develop, so naturally I should like it to start its life on something as close as possible to a democratic basis. Clearly it will not start on a wholly democratic basis because the Government will choose this country's representatives, so the democratic element could be introduced only at a second stage.

If we could start to invent a constitution for the United Kingdom, few people would dream up anything like the House of Lords, an upper House in which people who have not been subject to election legislate for us. In Europe we are at the beginning of that process and we have the opportunity to avoid creating unaccountable, unelected institutions which inevitably speak with less authority than they would enjoy if they had been elected.

Notwithstanding the rather peculiar way in which the Government have been led to introduce new clause 42, and the strange deals that they struck in Committee with the most unlikely people, I freely admit that I think that some progress has been made. I should like to think that we shall move towards a system whereby the Committee of the Regions will be established by either direct or indirect elections, to give it authority, so that the highlands and islands of Scotland can speak directly to, say, Sicily about the problems of remoteness and how the European Community's legislative process should take those problems into account in reaching its conclusions.

It is no use saying that that can all be ironed out at national level. No doubt Sicily will find Rome as unresponsive to its problems of remoteness from the centre as the highlands and islands find London.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I find it difficult to follow what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the highlands and islands of Scotland speaking directly within the context of the European Community to people from the island of Sicily. Surely that already happens. Elected members from Sicily and from Scotland—including Scottish nationalists—serve on the regional policy committee of the European Parliament. Why is it wrong that elected representatives from Sicily and from Scotland should speak together on the regional committee of the European Parliament yet right that they should do so on the Committee of the Regions?

Sir Roger Moate: Because that would be the hon. Gentleman's second chamber.

Mr. Maclennan: Exactly. It would reinforce the effectiveness of those representatives' voice. I do not see the issue as an either/or choice. It is certainly desirable that members of the European Parliament from the highlands should talk to members of the European Parliament from Sicily, but how much more effective it would be if those interests were reinforced at another level of the Community legislative process, by the direct contact that I foresee in the new development. I believe that there is considerable enthusiasm for the idea, at least in the highlands and islands of Scotland. There had already been contact between elected councillors, who had meetings with their opposite numbers long before the Committee of the Regions was dreamt up, and sought to promote within the European Community the interests of what were called the peripheral regions.

That is entirely welcome to me, because most of the tendencies of the Community in its first few years—possibly for its first decade—were centralising. There was a failure to recognise that the needs of those beyond the golden triangle must be consciously protected by the legislative processes of the Community and that something more than mere lip service to those interests was required if the Community was not to be seen as a malign influence on the development of our country.

The new clause is a welcome measure. It does not go anything like far enough towards the establishment of a powerful part of a legislative process, but it will be useful.

Mr. Marlow: Local councillors are responsible for various functions, such as education, social services, housing and planning. They are responsible for others, but those are the most important. Europe is not responsible for housing, education, social services or planning. If the detested Committee of the Regions is to exist, why send councillors to it?

Mr. Maclennan: That is a good question to address to the Government. Why not send directly elected people to it? That would be the preferable route. We should have a Committee of the Regions with members directly elected by a fair and proportional system. That would secure a more suitable form of legislature.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman might find it helpful to throw that question back to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) because when we debated an amendment in the same terms in Committee, he voted for the proposition that he is now questioning.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Minister for prodding my memory. It is unusual to invite the hon. Member who has the Floor to ask another hon. Member to intervene in the way the Minister suggests, and I am not sure how the Chair would react to such a request by me. But the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) is not usually slow to intervene if he sees an opportunity to get himself out of a hole that the Minister has dug for him.

I am satisfied that, so far as it goes, the new clause is to be welcomed. It is a modest step towards democratic accountability, to strengthening the authority of the Committee of the Regions and to giving it some influence, albeit modest, over the legislative process of the Community. To that, at this stage in its development, is perhaps as far as we can aspire.

Mr. Marlow: The Minister of State made, towards the end of the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), an uncharacteristically ungenerous intervention. I did indeed vote for the

amendment in Committee, and I should have thought that my right hon. Friend would have been grateful to see a sinner turn to repentance. But I have not turned to repentance, because I knew precisely what I was doing when I voted in Committee.

I do not like the Committee of the Regions, and I do not like the Bill. I thought that we should have further debate about the Committee of the Regions and that we should certainly debate the Bill on Report. My right hon. Friend and I have discussed these issues before. On one occasion, we spoke about a tactical or probing closure. On that occasion, it was a probing vote.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. I am seeking to establish, not just for the group of amendments now before the House but perhaps for others, that the votes that my hon. Friend casts are cast primarily for tactical reasons rather than for any attachment to a cause. He seems to be suggesting that, although I do not wish to lead him down a route that he does not intend to take.

Mr. Marlow: In common with my right hon. Friend, one votes in this place for a variety of reasons on a variety of occasions. On that occasion, rather than a tactical it was a strategic decision to vote for the amendment. We now have an opportunity to put the matter right.

Hon. Members may be aware that my name is attached to two amendments in the group now being discussed. Both are concerned with representation on the Committee of the Regions. I am in very august company on one, because the first name, after which mine appears, is that of the Foreign Secretary. That amendment would withdraw from the amended Bill the amendment to which the House agreed in Committee, and hurrah for that.

Sir Roger Moate: Would my hon. Friend vote for that?

Mr. Marlow: Most certainly. I would vote for it for strategic and tactical reasons, and with pleasure. It is my intention to vote for it should an opportunity arise at a later stage.

I have tabled another amendment about how and from where—from which parts of the United Kingdom—the members of the committee should be selected. I understand that the Committee of the Regions is basically a body that has been established for reasons that we have not been given. But we know, if we read the treaty in detail, that the committee will be consulted about the allocation of structural funds and regional development funds. In other words, where there is money to be spent, members of the Committee of the Regions will be guiding and directing, as far as they can, where that money should be spent.

That brings me to the important issue of who should be on the committee. I asked the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland what the organisation would do. One reads the treaty from beginning to end and one reads in *Hansard*, among other things, the remarks that the Minister of State made on previous occasions about the remit and role of the committee, but nothing can one find.

But one knows, having had a certain amount of exposure to European legislation, having read the treaty in some detail and knowing where European legislation will go in the future, that Europe does not have responsibility for education or local planning——

Sir Roger Moate: Or for social services.

Mr. Marlow: Exactly: as my hon. Friend points out, it does not have responsibility for social services. It does not have any responsibility for those activities for which local government is responsible. So if we are to send people to the committee, and if the Committee of the Regions is to exist, the last people on earth we should send at this stage are local councillors, because they will be talking about issues that have nothing to do with local councils.

It is clear that we must have another think about the matter. That is one reason why I am delighted to have voted as I did in Committee, because the House now has another opportunity to look carefully at that important organisation, the Committee of the Regions. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) said that he saw it as a potential second chamber, a sort of senate——

Sir Roger Moate: I did not say that.

Mr. Marlow: I apologise if I have misinterpreted my hon. Friend.

Sir Roger Moate: I hope that my hon. Friend will not credit me with such ambitions or fears. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), speaking for the Liberals, saw it, frankly and honestly, as a potential second chamber. Perish the thought. One has that very fear, for it could go in all sorts of directions and I do not for a moment want to think of it going in that direction.

Mr. Marlow: If I credited my hon. Friend with an interpretation that was not correct, I immediately discredit him with that interpretation. As the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said, it is pregnant with potential—with great powers and potential damage—so we must be careful whom we send, and the last people we should send are local councillors.

Whom should we send? If there is to be local representation from the United Kingdom, we must look at the different parts of the country, at the different interests and think of the different sorts of people who should go. If London is a region, the best people to send are active professionals and financiers from London who know how the City of London and the guilds work and about the wealth-creating activities of the capital. They are best able to represent London, because they generate its wealth.

If we are to send people from the midlands region—the black country and Birmingham—where much manufacturing takes place, perhaps we should send representatives from the wealth-creating community there. In other contexts, we should send arts and heritage people and those concerned with culture and the environment. Consider the broad open spaces of Lincolnshire and the west country, where there is a great deal of agricultural activity. The best person to send from there might be a representative of the National Farmers Union or the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers. Councillors are the last people we should send.

Mr. Maclennan: Does not the hon. Gentleman remember that Lord Plumb, who was elected to the European Parliament, was the president of the National Farmers Union? Election to an organisation does not preclude someone from having a knowledge of what he or she is talking about.

7 pm

Mr. Marlow: That is a statement of the blindingly obvious. If we leave the Bill as it is at present, it means that members of the Committee of the Regions should be, first and foremost, local councillors. It is my view—after mature consideration I expect that it will be the view of Conservative Members, and possibly of the House—that those people are the least able to fulfil the role, particularly if it becomes an important one.

We want people from the regions who represent the most important things which are happening there, for which Europe has responsibility. Europe has responsibility for trade and agriculture, and growing responsibilities in other spheres, many of which I would resist. Europe certainly has responsibility in matters of trade and agriculture. Therefore, surely, if regional views are to be represented at the European level, it is vital to send representatives of the regional views who are members of the corporate state—the great and the good, trade unionists, manufacturers, those with commercial and agricultural interests, and industrialists. Of course, there is a European dimension to our cultural and environmental affairs.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said in a previous debate—*[Interruption.]* He does not have to listen to what I am saying, it is not particularly important. There are organisations within our body politic where people with different interests and from different parties can come together, consult and decide on the most appropriate people to fulfil the functions. I am sure that that process could be put into action through the usual channels. However, I stress that the important factor is to send those people who will make the most impact on the policies decided at European level, and those people should not be councillors.

The amendment in my name—I think, amendment No. 32—covers how the positions should be allocated within the United Kingdom, which is to have 24 seats. I understand that the Scots and the Welsh have their eye on the lion's share of the seats, and I can understand why. They have always looked upon themselves as different and specific regions, and having done so, they expect to be treated better, pro rata, than the rest of the kingdom.

Even my right hon. Friend the Minister said on 25 February that he recognised that there would need to be "some tilting towards Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 1064.]

I do not recognise that, and I do not think that my constituents do. It has nothing to do with the states, principalities and nations that make up the United Kingdom, but with the fact that equal representation is available to all

We know that, for historical reasons, Scottish Members of the House represent fewer constituents than English Members. As I understand it, that was contained in the treaty of Union, and we cannot do a great deal about it —perhaps we should not. However, we do not have to extend that principle to the Committee of the Regions. Nobody has given any justification or reason why we should do so.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will notice that my name appears among those supporting his amendment. I speak as a Scot and ask my hon. Friend whether he believes that there is a danger of the separatists using the vehicle of additional bodies in what they believe to be places of influence to undermine Parliament. That is why it would be wrong to base the representation of the Committee of the Regions on the representation in this place.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for my amendment, and I also concur with what he has said. I am sure that it is more than a twinkle or gleam in the eye of the Commission that the Committee of the Regions should include among its functions that of dissolving the bonds within the United Kingdom, so that Brussels can reach over the head of the House and seduce what it considers to be the regions away from Parliament, the House and the kingdom. Surely it must be our role to thwart that ambition.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I hope that it has not escaped the attention of my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that the way to have cast aside the fears now being expressed with such eloquence by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North would have been to support the Government in defeating Labour's amendment in Committee. Had they done so, none of the fears that my hon. Friend is now voicing about elected councillors and deals with nationalists would have arisen.

Mr. Marlow: With respect, I think that I have covered that issue. I am now talking, not about whether elected councillors should be appointed, but about the regional allocation of seats.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Perhaps uncharacteristically, far from apologising for having discussions through the usual channels in the House, on this occasion I regard them as a good thing in themselves. However, such discussions would probably not have been initiated had my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North and for Tayside, North supported the Government on the amendment.

Mr. Marlow: I am not sure what my right hon. Friend is saying, but it could be very important. If my right hon. Friend is saying that he did not like the amendment in Committee, is not happy with new clause 42 which the Government have tabled, would be happy for it to be defeated and then propose a mixture of appointees to the Committee of the Regions which would do the job more effectively for the United Kingdom, I should be happy to support him.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend—whom I hold in esteem and affection—is telling the House that he will now vote against precisely the same proposition as he supported in Committee. I beg him not to play games with me or the House. The Government were defeated in Committee. We are now acting as a Government should in that position. We had to decide whether to seek to overturn the decision—we believe that we do not have the support of my hon. Friend in doing so—or to comply with the will of the House. We are complying with the will of the House. I beg my hon. Friend not to play games with either the House or me. He supported one proposition a month ago and is now speaking and advocating a vote against the proposition.

Mr. Marlow: I genuinely hold my right hon. Friend in great esteem and affection—I am sure that my right hon.

Friend was also genuine when he made that remark of me. I explained in detail to my right hon. Friend what happened on a previous occasion. My right hon. Friend was saying with regard to our Irish friends in the Chamber that he would not want to start from here, but we are here, and we have to improve the position from here. The Government are apparently accepting what happened in Committee. If the Government have a better policy that they feel will better fulfil the United Kingdom's role than the solution produced in Committee.—*[Interruption.]* If my right hon. Friend wants to discuss possible alternatives that will gain majority support among Conservative Members and sufficient support within the House to gain victory, he should produce them.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I shall not intervene on my hon. Friend again, but he is playing games with me and with the House that do not deceive me or the House. It is clear that he played games in Committee and is playing games again. I think that that fact should lie on the record.

Mr. Marlow: That is my right hon. Friend's view. My right hon. Friend knows that the Bill is dynamite. There are many ways of resolving the problems that we face. There are opportunities for the Government, not only here but in another place, to resolve the problems over the Committee of the Regions. If the Government feel that the Bill, as presently amended, is wrong, they have plenty of opportunities to put it right. They will receive the overwhelming support of Conservative Members.

Mr. Mallon: I listened to the hon. Gentleman with some interest in Committee, as I have today, and I see that there is some misunderstanding between the Minister and himself. Let me give him the opportunity of clarifying matters. Will he confirm to the House—it would dispel the fears of the Minister and many others—whether, irrespective of how many would be on the committee, who they were, from where they were selected and how they were to operate, he would still be opposed to a Committee of the Regions—or are there circumstances in which he would support it? That would clarify the position for us all.

Mr. Marlow: To be quite frank, I do not like the Committee of the Regions. I am not sure what it is there to do, potentially what it might do in future, what its powers may be and how the House will be able to influence those powers at a later stage. If there is to be a Committee of the Regions, I believe that there may be a balance of members and a means of appointment that may be more satisfactory than that on the face of the Bill.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for going some way towards clarifying his position. He voted against it on the last occasion and he is voting for it today, so we are becoming confused. I ask him again whether there is any set of circumstances, irrespective of the numbers on the committee and its personnel, in which he would vote for a Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Marlow: The straight answer to the hon. Gentleman's point is that, if I could abolish the Committee of the Regions, I would do so. But if there is to be a Committee of the Regions and if I have any ability to influence its membership, I would seek to do so in such a way as not to have locally elected councillors and to look at the regional allocation of membership of the committee.

Luxembourg, which has roughly the same population as Northamptonshire, has been allocated six places on the Committee of the Regions. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) was talking about the red banana—the wealthy part of Europe with the fewest regional problems—and that includes Luxembourg.

In the House, there are six hon. Members representing Northamptonshire. Luxembourg is of similar size, but is to have six out of 189 members of the Committee of the Regions throughout Europe. That is totally disproportionate and unacceptable.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Luxembourg is a very small country with one full-powered Commissioner to balance it out. Why should it have six representatives on the Committee of the Regions when it has a full-powered Commissioner at the seat where decisions are taken?

Mr. Marlow: I could not agree more strongly. The powers of the small states within Europe are far too great in proportion to their population. Why should we reinforce and sustain that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This has very little to do with the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Marlow: I certainly accept your rebuke, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

With regard to the number of members of the Committee of the Regions, if I were to ask my constituents whether Northampton should be included with four or five other counties, they would not accept that. Why should Luxembourg have 20 times the representation of Northamptonshire? Has it regional problems additional to those in Northamptonshire? How can it be justified? How can we agree to the over-representation of Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and Denmark?

The balance of the Committee of the Regions will come from the smaller countries of Europe. Countries such as Belgium and Holland are part of the wealthy heart of Europe; they do not have more problems, and they do not need more consideration and a higher profile on the Committee of the Regions. Why have we agreed to that? Returning to the membership of the United Kingdom allocation, surely it should be decided on a pro rata basis within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Does it follow from the hon. Gentleman's argument that he believes that Germany should have approximately twice as many representatives as the United Kingdom on the Committee of the Regions?

7.15 pm

Mr. Marlow: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, who has made some splendid speeches on the Bill, but he will know as I do that the population of Germany is not twice that of the United Kingdom. Under present proposals, Germany is getting the same allocation as the United Kingdom. That is wrong; there should be more German representatives on the Committee of the Regions than there are representatives from the United Kingdom. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is trying to provoke me into agreeing with him, but we do agree.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does the thrust of my hon. Friend's argument suggest that he is a late convert to proportional representation?

Mr. Marlow: I take the Italian view of proportional representation. I do not support proportional representation. It has nothing to do with proportional representation. If my hon. Friend thinks that to have similar-sized constituencies in Lincolnshire, Essex, the west country or Scotland is proportional representation, that is not my understanding. It is the first-past-the-post system in which each Member of Parliament has roughly the same number of constituents. We have the same job, and in this day and age, when much is done by telephone and through the media, the size of the constituency rather than the number of people in it is less relevant than it was in the past.

If we are to establish a new organisation, the most sensible way to do it is on a pro rata basis, not just between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but within England and the rest of Europe. I find it difficult to support a concept that does the opposite.

Having said all that, the amendment in my name and that of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary would delete the amendment made in Committee. I know it will cause great consternation to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, but I shall have great joy in supporting it when the time comes.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: This has been quite a remarkable debate in one unique sense—that the integrity of myself and my colleagues has been attacked from a number of directions. We had a fierce attack from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), flanked as he was earlier by the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). We had an equally fierce attack from those who have opposed the Bill throughout the Committee stage.

It is quite remarkable that we should have been subject to those attacks, bearing in mind of course that we supported the Bill on Second Reading. We made it quite clear on Second Reading and in Committee why we supported the Bill: we wanted to see the Maastricht treaty implemented quickly. We wanted to see progress being made towards its ratification.

I hope that the hon. Members who attacked us for voting in that way will at least acknowledge that we were consistent. Throughout the Committee stage of the Bill we supported ways in which quicker progress could be made and we voted to ensure that any amendment which sought to wreck the treaty and undermine it was voted down. That was an honourable position for us to have taken and we have been consistent in our view.

The hon. Member for Hamilton said, "Look how many times Plaid Cymru voted for the Bill." We make no apologies whatsoever for that because we are four square behind the principles enshrined in the treaty. It does not go as far as we would like in a number of respects, but our position is absolutely clear.

In responding to my interventions, the hon. Member for Hamilton failed to acknowledge that there was no difference whatsoever in the pattern of voting that I and my colleagues established prior to the vote on the Committee of the Regions and subsequently. He will find the same consistent pattern. What surprised me about the voting records of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, particularly as the hon. Gentleman is an avowed pro-European, is that on more than 30 occasions they were prepared to walk through the Lobbies with Conservative Members whose avowed intention is to destroy the treaty. They consistently voted with them.

Why did they do that? Why do pro-Europeans find themselves in the Lobby with the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)? What did he tell us tonight? He wants to scrap the Committee of the Regions. He wants to see it destroyed. What did the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) tell the House? He said that the Committee of the Regions is a pathetic and absolutely useless body. Yet on that night he was in the Lobby with Labour Members. That is a contradiction. How can one say that one favours a principle and yet consistently vote against it?

Mr. George Robertson: The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) says that he is voting on principle, but with his colleagues he is a signatory to amendment No. 2. If the Government put the Tellers in, he will be voting with us and with the Tory rebels on amendment No. 2. He has made an exception in that instance. Why should he criticise hon. Members who have made that discriminating choice on other occasions?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Member for Hamilton claims to have read our voting record and to have given the House the numbers. He spoke of 52 occasions out of 59. Did he read the vote in the House on his party's amendment to the social chapter on Second Reading? Where did he find us in the Lobbies on that night? He found us with himself and his hon. Friends because we are consistent and have always said that the social chapter should be included. *[Interruption.]* On Second Reading the Opposition put down an amendment which said that the social chapter should be part of the treaty. We voted with Labour Members on that occasion because we believe in it. That is the principle on which we stood.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Hamilton, I asked myself why he was attacking us. What does he find obnoxious in Wales getting at least three members, and possibly four, on the Committee of the Regions? What does he find obnoxious in my party's accepting that the members of the Committee of the Regions should be elected councillors or in the fact that the representatives in Wales should be answerable to a body?

Then I realised why he did not like the arrangement to ensure that Wales has a number of representatives to the Committee of the Regions which is more than his party would allow. A report in the *Municipal Journal* of 12 March 1993 shows that the Labour-dominated associations of local authorities have carved up the Committee of the Regions between themselves. This is the deal that the Labour party has done to stitch up Wales and Scotland. Let me tell the House about it:

> "The associations have agreed how the committee places should be divided, with 10 for English shire areas; six (English metropolitan districts); two (London); two (Wales); three (Scotland) and one for Northern Ireland."

Is that what the Labour party wants Wales to have—two representives on the Committee of the Regions? That was not good enough for us in March. It is not good enough for us today either. We are out to get the best deal that we can for Wales. We are out to ensure not only that

we get the highest number possible squeezed out of the House of Commons but that they do not come from one party.

Mr. Marlow: What the hon. Gentleman says is very interesting. Is he saying that the Labour party suggests that Wales should have twice as many members of the Committee of the Regions as London, which has four times the population of Wales? How does he justify that?

Mr. Jones: We have always accepted that there is a difficulty about representation in the House for Wales and Scotland. The hon. Member for Northampton, North has acknowledged that the House accepts that. The principle is enshrined in the way in which hon. Members are elected to the House. The hon. Member has said that there are more representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for historical reasons. That, I believe, should be reflected in the way we send people to the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Marlow: Why?

Mr. Jones: Because we are disadvantaged.

Let me return to the point that I was making about who should go to the Committee of the Regions. We made it clear that they should be elected councillors and that nobody else was acceptable. Let me go further. I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Hamilton. He said that Labour Members did not want the House of Commons to decide who should select the representatives, that Labour Members were perfectly content for the House of Commons to state that they should be elected councillors and that they did not want to tie the hands of the House as to how those people should be selected. Under the Labour amendment the three, or two, representing the region of Wales on the Committee of the Regions could be Conservative councillors, and they could not have opposed that. That might be the Government's choice. Conversely—and this is the real reason why the Labour party did not want to tie anyone's hands—if it had its way, they would be three, or two, Labour councillors.

I say that because I listened with care to the hon. Member for Hamilton saying that because Plaid Cymru had less than 10 per cent. of the vote in Wales it should not have a representative and because the Liberal party had only 15 per cent. of the vote it should not have one. The Labour party had 50 per cent. of the vote in Wales. Does that mean that all the councillors should be Labour?

Mr. Ron Davies: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is not being strictly accurate in his representation of Labour party policy. It has been made abundantly clear by me and by many of my colleagues who represent Welsh constituencies that it is our intention—and it is a fact, now that the House has accepted our proposal—that these representatives should come from local government. We have made it clear that the precise mechanism for choosing those individuals should be decided by the institutions of local government in Wales, either by the Association of Welsh Counties or by the Council of Welsh Districts.

Let me make clear a point that should be established at this stage. The proposition that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) has entered into by means of some covert agreement with the Government will now require members of Plaid Cymru to submit a list to the Government so that they can vet those nominees and make a selection from the names. That is not the way the Labour party intends to do it. If it is the case that one representative is allocated to the Labour party, we will have a secret ballot. Why does the hon. Gentleman not decide that this is an appropriate course of action for him to follow?

Mr. Jones: Let me make it clear to the hon. Member that there would be no veto on anyone chosen if it should be a Plaid Cymru representative. I can tell him as well that there would be no Plaid Cymru, Liberal or any other representative if the Labour party had its way.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that as regards Wales the Labour amendment is wholly otiose because all the discussions that the hon. Member and his hon. Friends had with the Treasury Bench were at all times on the basis that all representatives should be representatives of local government? So there is nothing in the amendment for Wales.

Mr. Jones: Absolutely. The only arrangement that benefits Wales is the one made by Plaid Cymru, no thanks to the Labour party which would have let Wales down with two representatives, it seems, as Labour Members have not challenged the report in the *Municipal Journal*.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Member reflect on the earlier part of the debate and the revelation of my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, dominated by the Labour party, has suggested that five out of the six representatives allowed by the Labour party, that is, three representatives and three alternates, should be Labour councillors?

In an earlier debate, that seemed to come as something of a surprise to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). Does it give the hon. Gentleman any confidence that the Labour party would treat Wales any differently from Scotland, where it has tried to carve up the seats according to its liking?

7.30 pm

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes his own point. It is perfectly clear that the reason why the Labour party was so angry about the arrangement that we were able to secure for Wales was that it upset the little stitch-up that it had done with its friends elsewhere.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman is giving the House entirely inaccurate information. If he consults the councillors who represent his party on the Council of Welsh Districts, they will tell him that I and my colleagues met them in January of this year and made it absolutely clear that the Labour party recognised that there would have to be a plurality of representation. Furthermore, we believed that the decision should be based on a secret ballot of all councillors in Wales, making up an electoral college devised in such a way as to provide proper representation for the north, the south, the east, the west, urban and rural districts, and men and women. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept this and stop trying to misrepresent the Labour party's position.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has spent six weeks misrepresenting the position of my party. All I have done is quote a report that appeared in a respected journal, showing what the Labour-dominated Association of Welsh Counties has said.

[Mr. Jones]

I would take all this much more kindly from the hon. Gentleman if everything that he has said about his wishes had been included in his amendment. Had it mentioned plurality and the sort of numbers that Wales should have, I could have accepted that.

Mr. Hoon: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman and have tried to understand the basis on which he suggests representation should be allocated to the Committee of the Regions. I do not question his claim to be a man of principle from a party of principle, but what I have failed to understand from his speech is what exactly the principle of representation that he advocates is. I have been able to understand only that he says Wales should get more because Wales is disadvantaged. I do not dispute that—Scotland is disadvantaged, the east midlands is disadvantaged, and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends represent disadvantaged constituencies in the north. That is not a principle: I am looking for a principle.

Mr. Jones: That is a good point, to which I shall come later.

I would like to list what we consider important ingredients in the way in which the committee's representatives are to be selected. First, there should be some bias in favour of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Secondly, the representatives should be elected people. Thirdly, they should not be chosen by Ministers. Fourthly, they should not come from one political tradition; they should reflect the diversity of political tradition in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Finally, they should go to the committee not merely representing themselves but as representing Wales; hence, they should report back.

These are the principles on which we have fought the campaign, and I hope that the hon. Member for Caerphilly accepts that. I outlined all these points once or twice in Committee, and the Minister responded to them there. There was nothing secret about them, either.

Mr. George Robertson: The vote in which the hon. Gentleman sided with the Government was a vote about the United Kingdom's delegation to the Committee of the Regions. I know that the hon. Gentleman represents a separatist party, so he may have no interest in the general composition of that delegation. The hon. Gentleman alleges that the principles on which he bases his support for the Government include the idea that something positive is being done for Wales. I should like to know whether he has the agreement in writing, because that is more than the SNP has. I say this because what the hon. Gentleman did on the night in question was to throw the rest of the country back into the lap of the Government's attempt to put their cronies—business men and appointees—on the committee to represent the rest of the country. Does the hon. Gentleman's interest in local democracy end at the borders of Wales; or did he ignore the interests of the rest of the country when he sided with the crony-backing Tory Government?

Mr. Jones: I find the hon. Gentleman's turn of phrase offensive. He has accused me of being a separatist—an emotive word. How can someone who supports the Maastricht treaty be a separatist?

Mr. Robertson: My knowledge of Wales——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is going rather wide of the new clause. Hon. Members can hold their discussions and fights outside.

Mr. Jones: I just want to put it on record that I deny that I am a separatist: I support the Maastricht treaty and this European Bill, which moves in a direction giving Wales a greater voice in the European Community, not on its own but in partnership with other small nations in the EC——

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): But many of the EC institutions are run from the centre.

Mr. Jones: I know that there is a distinctive voice in the Labour party that disagrees, and I understand and respect it—but I also want to make clear where I stand. Unlike Conservative Members, I believe that the Committee of the Regions has a valuable role to play. Certainly it is only a consultative body, but in time it will become a powerful voice for the regions and historic nations of Europe. I hope that that time will come soon.

Mr. Mallon: The debate began with an exposition of the nationalist parties' position, and it is ending on the same note. At the core of the debate have been several principles. It is remarkable how, in politics, when we discuss principles we soon get on to numbers—to do with representation or with pounds—but that seems to apply the world over.

In Committee and again today, we have often heard terms such as the nation, the state and the region. That is why this is an interesting part of the Maastricht debate. Nationalism has been debated in relation to the committee in four different ways. I can understand the position of the Scottish National party; I can understand the position of Plaid Cymru, which has presented its nationalist, if not separatist, ideas quite clearly; I even think that I can understand our party's nationalist position on this. The position that really intrigues me, however, is that of the English nationalists, as expressed by Conservative Members throughout these debates.

As a nationalist myself, I think that people are entitled to be English nationalists, just as I am entitled to be a separatist from Northern Ireland who believes that nationalism is a potent, creative and outgoing force. The problem with the English nationalist position, as expressed in these debates, is that it is introverted, inward looking and blinkered, refusing to look beyond itself and using this innocuous Committee of the Regions as an excuse to defend that inability to look outwards and see that there is a world in which it can flourish.

One good thing about the Committee of the Regions is that the representatives of each country will be in a minority. There will be nothing but minorities. Therefore, alliances will be forged and arrangements will be made to suit regions. There will be an agricultural lobby, which will be good for agriculture, and an industrial lobby, which will be good for industry. There will be lobbies for business and for labour.

It is likely that the representatives from this country, from Wales, from Scotland or even from Northern Ireland, if we have representation, will not all go in the same direction at all times. That will be good, because the Committee of the Regions will lead to a new type of debate about our involvement in Europe. Representatives will not consider matters from a national, a state or even a regional

position, but much more broadly. They will deal with matters more constructively than under the accepted Anglo-American system of a parliamentary democracy governed by a Whip system. That will be to the benefit of every country.

The new clause proposes that representation be confined to those elected to local authorities. I have reservations about that in relation to the north of Ireland. I wish well those who will have to endure the attitudes taken by members of Belfast city council, if they happen to be representatives. Again, there would be an advantage because it is rumoured that travel and involvement in Europe broaden the mind. We have only to look round this Parliament to see evidence of that. People come back from the European Parliament with broader views, especially if they represent Northern Ireland constituencies. That could contribute enormously to Northern Ireland.

I do not want to be parochial, except on one point. Some people refer to themselves as a nation or as a state, and look upon themselves as a state within a nation, but no one can argue that Northern Ireland is a nation, a state or a state within a nation. If ever a piece of legislation was framed to suit an area, it is the European Communities (Amendment) Bill because we truly are a region and we want to be part of the Europe of the regions because of the benefits which can accrue from it.

There will be not just financial benefit but other benefits too:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

The interchange of ideas can only be good for all of us, whatever regions we represent. A cultural interchange is surely worth developing within Europe. There is also political interchange. Are we so perfect that we cannot learn from other countries? Whoever we are, or wherever we come from, surely we can learn from other political or governmental arrangements within Europe. Or are we frozen in time and in our attitudes to the political process? We should not think of the benefits simply in monetary terms; there is more to it than that.

7.45 pm

The European experiment is growing and I support it fully. I support the Maastricht treaty because I am a nationalist and want to see the nationalisms that exist on both sides of the House developing in a creative, constructive way. We know what it is to have nationalism that is not constructive. Let us take the meaning of the words "Sinn Fein"; translated literally, they mean "ourselves alone". That is not the way in which to create a future. That form of nationalism is destructive and introverted, and it will not contribute to the wider Europe which we all want.

If there is one reason why we should want a wider Europe with an interchange of views, cultures and experience, it is what is happening in Yugoslavia. If it is thought that the new Europe should have a role in European defence, surely it is better that representatives from all parts of the region should add to the views of Governments. I welcome that as well.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) mentioned nationalists in different guises, shapes and forms. He leaves me bemused because he told us that he wants to see Europe working and the greater involvement of all countries. Those are splendid aspirations, yet he comes from a part of the United Kingdom where there is much trouble and he is part of a political system which wishes not to be part of the United Kingdom. He seemed to be making a case for being part of Europe which could equally be made for being part of the United Kingdom. He talked about working together. All the things that he said about Europe should be said about the United Kingdom and the benefits of the United Kingdom.

I wonder what category the hon. Gentleman would put me in. I am a Scot who has been concerned from the outset that the Maastricht treaty is an instrument that may, and probably will, lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. That is why I, as a Scot, oppose in principle the setting up of the Committee of the Regions.

Sadly, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is not here. Earlier he chastised my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) for being inconsistent and playing games. I trust that I am neither inconsistent nor deemed by anyone to be playing games. I do not support the setting up of the Committee of the Regions because I have a clear view of its possible impact on Scotland. But when it became clear that there would probably be a majority in favour of the Committee of the Regions, I had to examine carefully its composition and the way in which membership was to be allocated. I had in mind the possibility of a Report stage, and I wanted to ensure that we had the opportunity to consider the composition again. That seemed tactically to be wise. We were successful in both attempts. That is hardly playing games. Surely that is what Parliament is for.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real playing of games was referred to by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), in his sincere speech, when he talked about Yugoslavia where there was the same artificial federation, without democracy, as is proposed for Europe?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must not discuss Yugoslavia.

Mr. Walker: I shall not be tempted to do that. It is arrogant for politicians of my generation, who have been unable to resolve Northern Ireland's problems, to assume that we can resolve the problems of Europe and the world. I have never been able to understand that arrogance, because, as a Scot, I live with a constant constitutional problem. I fight every election on it and have been involved in it throughout my adult life because the constitution is important to all Scots from whatever side of the political spectrum.

No one doubts the integrity of the nationalists who clearly state that they want a separate Scotland with a separate Parliament, although I do not agree with that view. Nationalists see the Committee of the Regions as a vehicle by which they can further their aims. They make no secret of what they are attempting to do and I do not argue with the principle of that. However, those of us who oppose that should look carefully at the composition of the committee and how its members are selected because that will have a bearing on future events, especially if the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) has his way and it becomes what he called a senate, a second chamber to the European Parliament.

That is the route to separation. The European Parliament is trying to draw more powers to itself, and it

[Mr. Walker]

is proper for it to do that, although I do not agree with it. Our job in looking carefully at how the committee will be established and at the people who will serve on it will be to ensure that we do not pander to situations and circumstances that could lead to the creation of a vehicle for breaking up the United Kingdom.

No one should be in any doubt about the impact on the Scottish media when Brussels starts to deal directly with Edinburgh. That will be exploited by those who wish to break up the United Kingdom, and they will do that honourably and properly because that is what they want to do. This unitary Parliament with all its failings, including me with all my failings, and despite the fact that none of my amendments has been selected—which is my fault and not the fault of Parliament—is still the best legislative assembly anywhere. That does not mean that it is not vulnerable, because one of the great problems with democracy is that if we get things wrong we are in danger of setting up structures that may destroy what we set out to protect.

The problem with the Committee of the Regions is that it will become more than a talking shop, just as the European Parliament became more than just a talking shop. For those who do not know, the proportions in which we elect people to this place were laid down in a treaty signed in 1707 but which was the Scottish Act of 1706. Article 22 of that treaty of Union clearly sets out the numbers and it has nothing to do with Wales or Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: I should like to respond as sincerely as possible to the points made by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating Yugoslavia.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman spoke about the arrangement between Scotland and England. That is the same type of federalism that was referred to in another context.

Mr. Walker: I do not propose to enter that area. I have spent my adult life debating constitutional issues and I would welcome any opportunity to debate that matter anywhere with the hon. Gentleman. I know the contents of the treaty of Union and the changes that have been made since 1707. I have spent a lifetime studying it.

Parliament is drifting into a situation which will lead to those who follow me waking up one day and saying, "Good heavens, we have created a monster which will break up the United Kingdom." As I said in another speech, there is no point in saying, "I didnae ken", because, as the Scots say, "Ye ken noo." I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has returned to his place, because I dealt with his intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North.

One of the great problems in attempting to address this massive constitutional issue is that some people have trivialised it and have attempted to categorise people by putting them into suitable pigeon holes. Those of us who care about this Parliament and about the Union between Scotland and England, which created the finest country in the world in which to live, and which I want my grandchildren to enjoy, will recognise that, throughout the passage of the Bill, I have been motivated by my concern about what the Bill and the treaty, if they are enacted, will do to the unity of the United Kingdom. The Committee of the Regions will be a Trojan horse.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I think that all my hon. Friends will be consistent in the way that we vote. We voted for the amendment in Committee because we believe in a Committee of the Regions with elected members. We shall vote for the new clause because we welcome the proposal to have those elected members.

I welcome the committee because it will put decentralised government on at least the agenda of the European Community. Although the committee has an inadequate basis and an inadequate task, the expectations of the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) are more likely to come to pass than those of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Irrespective of whether the United Kingdom elects to the committee people of considerable ability, there is no doubt that European regions will put forward such people. Those people will be capable of addressing the issues of Europe and the influence and status of the committee will increase. It signals the beginning of a regional input to European decision making.

If the new clause is accepted the members of the committee will be elected and that will strengthen the United Kingdom and its representatives on the committee. If we had unelected members and a large majority on the committee were elected representatives from the other member states, our position would be weak. Most member states will have elected participants and if we do the same the United Kingdom will have a greater influence.

How can we be sure that those who are selected, however it is done, will do the job effectively and be valuable members of the committee and properly represent the needs of the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish regions?

Over the past 12 years, much of my experience has been in regional representation. I have spent all that time as the chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside development association, which is the regional organisation used by the Department of Trade and Industry to attract inward investment. The Department accepts that the most effective way to promote the country abroad is to do so at the regional level. Much of my task as chairman of that organisation was to ensure a commitment from all parts of the region to promoting the region and to seek inward investment.

8 pm

We have to work at regional representation. Because of the fragmented nature of our local government, many of the regions, which are technically European regions, have an existence that is rarely cohesive and coherent. Part of the job of anyone who heads a regional organisation is to bring together different bodies to achieve regional representation. The success of Yorkshire and Humberside in attracting inward investment, for which the Conservative party has claimed the credit, has been due in no small part to the fact that one has worked to get people throughout the region committed to the regional view of the task to be undertaken. I have also headed Yorkshire Enterprise, which is a regional venture capital company. Again, its strength comes from operating on a regional basis.

Once we recognise that getting a regional base is subject to voluntary co-operation, we see how having regional representation on the Committee of the Regions can benefit us and give us more effective representation. However, our representation will be effective only if the representatives are able genuinely to exercise a regional mandate. For that reason, the question posed by Conservative Members about whether a member of a parish council represents an elected member appropriate to go on the Committee of the Regions is an empty one. We need people with a breadth of regional experience and a breadth of understanding of the needs of their entire region and we should be selecting people to undertake that task because we believe that they will have a mandate that encompasses not a narrow interest but all the interests of the region.

One of my experiences over recent years has been my involvement in international inter-regional work. I have been saddened by much that has been said tonight because I know from experience that there is value in working together with people from other regional organisations in other European countries. The formation of the organisation RETI—the Association of Traditional Industrial Regions of Europe—and the Assembly of European Regions shows that such organisations, once created, will develop and strengthen.

The Assembly of European Regions, which was formed in 1984, has influenced today's events. The proposal for a Committee of the Regions to be a senate for the regions was made by the assembly to the original meeting considering revisions to the treaty of Rome. That organisation has consistently pushed for the formation of a committee and it will continue to push to ensure that that committee gains stronger powers.

My involvement has shown, first, that in the varying strengths of regional governments among our European partners there is often a link between the strength of regional government and the strength of regional economies. When we last debated the Committee of the Regions, the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) said that the United Kingdom, in part, determined the formation of the German Länder. The aim then was to divide the country and weaken its national basis. However, in creating the Länder, we provided the basis for the stength of the German economy. Its form of regional government has helped it to develop a diverse and strong economy.

In the context of the Committee of the Regions, the Germans do not face our difficulty over representation. Already, they have determined that each of the 16 Länder will have one member on the Committee of the Regions, with a further five members being allocated one each to the five Länder with the greatest populations, some of which are considerable; for example, North Rhine-Westphalia has a population of 17 million. The strength of the European regions has been a factor in developing the Assembly of European Regions and in pushing for the development that we are debating today.

There has been value in direct representation. Many of the English counties have become involved in the Assembly of the European Regions, as have many metropolitan areas, with the joint agreement of their district councils. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) may pooh-pooh the Committee of the Regions, but he may have noted that Essex county council sends representatives to, and is a member of, the assembly. It has found that there is value in direct representation. It is extremely important in the decisions that we take that there is a form of direct representation from each of the accepted European regions. We have to devise a method whereby the selection of those people who represent the regions has the widest possible acceptance.

A number of practical consequences flow from inter-regional work in terms of the contacts between people and ideas and of the joint working between people faced with similar environmental, economic and industrial problems. I am convinced that the committee will be of good value.

It is obvious that Britain's decentralisation is a handicap in participating in regional forums, and therefore in terms of the balance that is struck in the decisions that the Government take about the composition of the committee. I urge the Government to follow up that proposal and the new clause with widespread consultation on the different balances that will need to be represented on the committee. There must be a fair distribution of seats, which includes representation from each of the European regions acknowledged as part of England, in addition to representation from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There must be a proper balance that reflects the strength of the political parties in the regions. There must be a balance between levels of authority where, as in Scotland, there are regional councils and local authorities. Each of the participating countries faces similar problems. I believe that the Committee of the Regions will develop and as it develops we may need alternative mechanisms for selecting representatives.

In due course, the Labour party's proposal for regional government will strengthen Britain's economy and democracy. With the introduction of genuine regional government we shall have no difficulty in sorting out the mechanism whereby we fill the places on the Committee of the Regions.

The committee's development and strength, its debates and decision, may help a Government who have consistently centralised to see the value of decentralisation. We shall in due course see the Labour party's proposals for regional government come to fruition in Britain.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

CONVERGENCE CRITERIA: ASSESSMENT OF DEFICITS

'. Before submitting the information required in implementing Article 103(3) of Title II of the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992, Her Majesty's Government shall report to Parliament for its approval an assessment of the medium term economic and budgetary position in relation to public investment expenditure and to the social, economic and environmental goals set out in Title II, Article 2, which report shall form the basis of any submission to the Council and Commission in pursuit of their responsibilities under Article 103 and 104c of the Treaty.'.—*[Mr. Andrew Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 12—*Convergence criteria: assessment of deficits—*

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

'. Before submitting the information required in implementing Article 103(3) of Title II of the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992, Her Majesty's Government shall report to Parliament for its approval an assessment of the medium term economic and budgetary position in relation to public investment expenditure and to the social, economic and environmental goals set out in Title II, Article 2, which report shall form the basis of any submission to the Council and Commission in pursuit of their responsibilities under Article 103 and 104c of the Treaty.'.

New clause 32—*Exchange rates (report)*—

'In implementing its obligations under Article 3a of Title II, Her Majesty's Government shall submit a report for consideration by Parliament before it initiates the action required to conduct a single exchange rate policy based on the irrevocable fixing of exchange rates; and the conclusions of Parliament on this report shall be submitted for information to the Council of Finance Ministers.'.

Amendment No. 3, in clause 2, page 1, line 28, after 'Parliament', insert

'and unless, pursuant to the goals set out in Article 2 of the Treaty of European Union, signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992 the following convergence criteria have been achieved:

(i) sustainable and non-inflationary growth: this will be apparent from an average rate of inflation in the Community over the latest preceding three years of not more than 1·5 per cent. and an average rate of growth in Community GDP over the same period of 3 per cent.

(ii) a high level of employment: this will be apparent from an average rate of unemployment over the latest preceding three years of not more than 5 per cent. both in the Community and in the United Kingdom.

(iii) economic and social cohesion: this will be apparent from the following:

(a) no Community region will have experienced an average GDP per capita income of less than 65 per cent. of the Community average over the latest preceding three years; and in the United Kingdom no region will have experienced an average GDP per capita income of less than 80 per cent. of the Community average over the same period.

(b) the rate of unemployment in each region of the United Kingdom shall not itself have varied by +/− 2 per cent. of the national rate of unemployment.

(c) the total Community Budget demonstrably used to fund such convergence shall be equivalent to 3 per cent. of Community GDP in each of the latest preceding three years.'.

Mr. Smith: The purpose of the amendment is simple and threefold. The first is to make clear the priority that the Opposition believe should attach to article 2 of the Maastricht treaty in setting the goals of the Community in general. Secondly, it makes clear the particular relevance of the provisions to any acceptable assessment of convergence in particular. Thirdly, it makes clear the importance that we attach to accountability to this Parliament when information is given to the Commission in the co-ordination of economic policy.

As most hon. Members will by now be aware, article 2 states:

"The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing the common policies or activities referred to in Articles 3 and 3a, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious and balanced development of economic activities, sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States."

Those are eminently desirable goals and I hope that few hon. Members, certainly on the Opposition Benches, would disagree that Britain and the whole of Europe would be much better off if economic policy were consistently and energetically devoted to their realisation.

It is also worth emphasising the extent to which article 2 of the Maastricht treaty represents a big step forward on the article 2 objectives as set out in the existing European Community treaties. The Maastricht treaty has added in as goals

"sustainable . . . growth respecting the environment, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, a high level of employment and social protection . . . and economic and social cohesion".

The inclusion of those objectives in the Maastricht treaty is greatly to be welcomed by democratic socialists, just as it probably explains why certain Conservative Members want to reject the treaty, including article 2.

A significant part of the debate on the economic aspects of the treaty in Committee turned on how far the article 2 objectives really were the defining goals of the Community and how far they could or would in practice be overridden by other provisions such as article 3a on the co-ordination of economic policies, article 104c on excessive deficits and articles 105 to 108a on monetary policy.

The Labour party is concerned about the interpretation and implementation of those provisions. We want to see the Community work as an engine of sustainable growth to benefit the many, not as an instrument of deflation to benefit only a few. The key resolution at our party conference last year made it clear that we see the treaty as far from perfect, but at the same time regard it as the best agreement that can currently be achieved.

The answer to those who claim that article 2 does not really offer much by way of reassurance is, first, that article 2 defines the task of the Community. It sets the political and legal context in which the rest of the treaty's provisions must be applied. That central role is not something that we simply imagine; it is there in the treaty, repeated in articles 3, 3a and 102a, which states:

"Member States shall conduct their economic policies with a view to contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the Community, as defined in Artice 2".

Secondly—a point which came up time and again——

Mr. Rowlands: Does my hon. Friend understand the difference between "with a view to contributing" and the imperatives of monetarism in the rest of the clauses?

8.15 pm

Mr. Smith: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I simply repeat that article 2 says that those are the tasks of the treaty and the other articles refer to the importance to be attributed to those particular goals. New clause 1 seeks further to reinforce that process. I have already made it clear to the House that the Labour party is concerned about the interpretation of the economic clauses in the Bill. Later, I shall reinforce certain other concerns that we have in that respect.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall give way in a moment.

I emphasise a point that came up repeatedly in Committee, and that is that the Maastricht treaty provides a framework through which economic, political and social

co-operation and integration will be pursued. The use to which that framework will be put, the specific policies that member states and Community institutions will agree to, will and must depend on political will and on the balance of political power and argument in the Community as it develops and at such time as further decisions on its development are taken.

My third point in response to those who have doubts about the importance and impact of article 2 is that we have in the House the opportunity to signal, through our amendments to the Bill, how we wish on behalf of our constituents the treaty to be interpreted and how we wish its provisions to be operated.

As many hon. Members have found, the criteria for the acceptability of amendments as being in order on the Bill are limiting, but we can already claim modest successes on the economic front in forcing the acceptance of Committee stage new clause 1, now clause 3, which secures greater accountability for the Bank of England than exists at the moment; in winning Committee stage new clause 2, now clause 4, requiring a comparative assessment of the United Kingdom's economic performance; and in incorporating Committee stage amendment No. 420 on co-ordination of economic policies and the importance of ECOFIN.

Those are in addition to the notable victory on the Committee of the Regions and the acceptance of new clause 74, now clause 5. That is a measure of the effort that the Opposition have put into the Bill and the support that we have been able to win from other quarters for the amendments that we sought.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): As the hon. Gentleman is going through the various amendments that have been agreed to during the Bill's passage, the effect of many of which is to add a stage that allows for parliamentary consideration of different aspects of our relationship with the Community, this may be an appropriate moment for me to tell the House and the hon. Gentleman that the Government are minded to accept new clause 1 subject to a few technical manuscript amendments which are available to the House and which the hon. Gentleman has seen, the effect of which is simply to correct some drafting in the new clause in line with the corrections that are provided for in an Opposition amendment that we are due to consider later.

Mr. Smith: I welcome the Minister's concession, which marks a further victory for Labour and for the common-sense arguments that we made for increasing accountability to Parliament in respect of the treaty's implementation. It also reinforces the view held on this side of the House that the treaty's economic provisions must work towards co-ordinated growth, not deflation or monetarism.

Mr. Salmond: My attempt to intervene a few seconds ago has probably been overtaken by events. I am sympathetic to new clause 1, but it struck me that if it was harmless enough the Government would accept it. The fact that they have confirms my suspicions.

Mr. Smith: We enter a tempting period. As the Government are accepting our amendments as fast as we can table them, we might be tempted to push through a few more and improve the Bill still further.

New clause 1 confers real benefits in respect of interpreting the way in which the treaty is implemented in relation to the United Kingdom economy and to the goals for employment, growth and equity that we believe are so enormously important.

The Government's further concession is an admission of defeat. I do not believe that the Financial Secretary would accept our amendments if he believed for one moment that the Government had enough votes in the House this evening to defeat them. The Government do not have the votes, any more than they have the arguments.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret the hon. Gentleman's reception for the Government's attitude. We share with members of the Labour Front Bench, and I hope with every right hon. and hon. Member, a desire to see parliamentary scrutiny provided in every appropriate situation. We agree with the Opposition that we have an appropriate opportunity to include a new phase of parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Smith: I admire the straight-faced way in which the Financial Secretary made those remarks. I look forward to the Government accepting the force of our arguments and the logic of parliamentary arithmetic in respect of amendment No. 2.

The longer the Committee stage continued, and given the Government's further concession today, the larger the proportion of the Bill that was effectively written by the Labour party rather than by the Government. Even before today's concession, Labour's word count share was 50 per cent., and the concession takes it over 50 per cent. Our victory on amendment No. 2 will take the figure higher still.

Mr. Rowlands: Has amendment No. 3, which has some substance to it, the support of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench?

Mr. Smith: As there is not to be a vote on amendment No. 3, I am not sure that I would be in order to respond.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is not a Third Reading debate. The House is considering a group of new clauses and amendments, to which the hon. Gentleman should restrict himself. They offer plenty of scope.

Mr. Smith: I will do so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have considerable sympathy with the spirit behind amendment No. 3, but given that we will not vote on it, any response would be hypothetical. I have two reservations about that amendment. One is the provision that it makes for inflation to average 1·5 per cent. over three years. That could be an excessively deflationary—some would say even monetarist—target.

Also, that amendment states that an amount equivalent to 3 per cent. of Community gross domestic product would demonstrably have to be applied to social and economic cohesion. Important though they are, 3 per cent. would represent a doubling and close to a trebling of the existing proportion of Community GDP spent on the whole EC budget. That would take us to the fringes of Euro-fedralism, to which my hon. Friend is very hostile.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My hon. Friend indicated that he believed that 1·5 per cent. inflation is rather deflationary, if that is not a contradiction. As article 2 refers to non-inflationary goals, and as my hon. Friend is very keen on that article, does he not agree that 1·5 per cent. inflation is better than zero inflation?

Mr. Smith: That criticism is one that we apply to the treaty's convergence criteria as well as to amendment No. 3. The difficulty is in choosing specific figures and then insisting that they must apply in any one year. Of course we want non-inflationary growth, and we see no advantage in inflation. However, to argue arbitrarily that, regardless of wider economic circumstances, one could not go above inflation of 1·5 per cent. and still progress towards economic and monetary union could prove deflationary in effect.

Bearing in mind your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make my arguments in favour of new clause 1.

Sir Russell Johnston: Given that the Government have accepted new clause 1, would it not be a good thing if we were all to stop talking about it?

Mr. Smith: In view of the extent of our deliberations, that is a tempting proposal. It provides an opportunity to quote a nice item from the diary in this morning's issue of *The Guardian:*

"Before staggering back into the quagmire of the Maastricht debate, the House of Commons could take a lesson fom the Ursuline Sisters. They organised an international conference on Europe, based at their convent at Westgate-on-Sea, clearly conscious that it's a subject on which tempers and patience fray. The programme for the main day went: '11.15 am—Herr Karl Wimberger, Principal of Friedrich-Spee-Kolleg, Neuss, Germany, The European Dimension in Education; 12.15 pm—lunch; 1.30 pm—short walk by the sea'."

Perhaps the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) is inviting the House to move as quickly as possible and to take a short walk by the sea. Nevertheless, it is important to make the arguments for new clause 1—though perhaps not at great length—and for right hon. and hon. Members to hear them and to contribute their own views. Otherwise, Government acceptance of an Opposition amendment will merely serve as a way of ending a debate, which would do a disservice to democracy, which figures so largely in concerns expressed by right hon. and hon. Members about the treaty and its implementation.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and some Conservative Members expressed anxiety about the convergence criteria, and fear that the provisions in respect of deficits are open to unduly restrictive interpretation. There is no doubt in my mind that the inclusion in the treaty of particular reference values—the ratio of public debt to GDP and the ratio of Government deficit to GDP—goes beyond the sort of framework provisions appropriate to the treaty. It is an attempt to introduce a specific policy and one redolent of particular economic theories prevailing, although not generally accepted, at the time when the treaty was drawn up.

There is no doubt in my mind that, in so far as the balance of Government income and expenditure is a matter of Community interest, it would have been much better for it to have been left to agreement between the member states, taking account of the changing circumstances of the Community, under the general co-ordination and provisions of article 103, rather than inserting specific targets in the treaty. From the Labour party's point of view, an inflexible interpretation of the provisions is unacceptable and must be avoided.

8.30 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Surely my hon. Friend is implying that if we have this position we should oppose these criteria. The national executive said that convergence has to be in real terms—a real convergence of the power, strength and productivity of economies. As these entirely fallacious deflationary convergence criteria have been written into the treaty—and as my hon. Friend wants to interpret them—how can we interpret what is quite specific? Should not we reject it because it is so specific?

Mr. Smith: The case that I am making is that the interests of the people we represent—and, indeed, of Europe as a whole—demand a flexible interpretation of these provisions. As my hon. Friend is well aware, and as I have already quoted, the Labour party's policy, decided by conference, was that the treaty is far from perfect but is the best agreement currently achievable.

It is in that spirit that we have made it clear that we have no wish to wreck the Maastricht process. That does not stop us from expressing apprehension about those parts of the treaty which cause us particular concern, and this is one such part. That is why I underline that we are concerned that there should not be an inflexible, mechanistic, rigid interpretation of these provisions.

We can call in aid, of course, the wording of the treaty, which states in article 104c that in assessing deficits

"The report of the Commission shall also take into account whether the government deficit exceeds government investment expenditure and take into account all other relevant factors, including the medium term economic and budgetary position of the Member State."

Of course, in the present circumstances, it would be sheer folly to attempt rigidly to enforce a year-on-year limit of 3 per cent. on Government deficits.

I think that my hon. Friends accept that it is quite reasonable to seek to contain the scale of the average Government deficit across the economic cycle. If debt repayments are not to eat into the resources available for other public expenditure, a sustainable relationship between Government debt and economic growth is essential over the medium term. That is quite different from saying that in any one year the deficit must be kept to 3 per cent. That would completely ignore the important dual role that a sustainable deficit has, first, in funding investment expenditure with an economic return of benefit to the economy as a whole and, secondly, in the operation of counter-cyclical policy where one would expect, and in all probability need, the deficit to be larger in the depth of a recession than at the peak of a recovery.

Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said in his speech in Paris on 15 January,

"It would also . . . be misguided for the European Community as a whole to make the same mistake of seeking arbitrarily to curb public deficits at a time when the European economy is poised on the verge of recession. There is clearly a danger that this may occur if the fiscal deficit rules of the Maastricht Treaty are rigidly interpreted. An excessively strict application of the protocol which specifies a target of 3 per cent. for government deficits would compound the existing financial squeeze which has been caused by high interest rates in Germany.

If all member states of the EC tried to satisfy the 3 per cent. target by the end of 1996, for example . . . the combined effect on total EC output would be a reduction of over 2 per cent. This is obviously absurd and simply not feasible for a majority of member states of the Community. I would argue very strongly that the three per cent. rule must exclude all

deficit-funded capital investment and take full account of the state of the economic cycle in each member state and in particular trends in unemployment. The Community will need to clarify these points if it is to avoid adding a fiscal choke to the monetary grip that has already sharply reduced growth in the European economy."

Dr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I am in sympathy with that statement, but is there not a problem? My hon. Friend urges us to exercise flexibility on certain criteria. In Germany, politicians from the major parties can sell monetary union to their electorates only on condition that exactly those criteria are rigidly applied. Does that not mean that we must look at what the treaty says, not at what it might say?

My hon. Friend may wish to consider the possibility that, for the reason that I have outlined, monetary union is not politically feasible. If that is the case, ought we not to say so?

Mr. Smith: If it turns out not to be feasible, progress towards it will be considerably slower than the target set out in the Maastricht treaty. Indeed, the wording in the treaty provides for that to happen. I do not dispute my hon. Friend's argument that there are tensions between different member states and between different parties within member states as well as between parties in each member state in regard to the precise interpretations to be placed on the treaty.

I think that that reinforces the thrust of my argument that the issue ultimately turns on political will, and on winning the political argument in Europe, so that progress towards economic and monetary union can be accompanied by real convergence. That was the spirit behind amendment No. 3. It should also work in favour of the high levels of employment and equity that my hon. Friends and I are so keen to achieve.

It is not as though the treaty entirely pointed towards the deflationary nightmares that my hon. Friends rightly fear. I have already reinforced the prime importance of the task that article 2 sets the Community. For example, the protocol on convergence itself must be rewritten and agreed between the member states before the provisions are given operational definition. There is scope in the Maastricht process for us to ensure, jointly with those who think similarly in the rest of Europe, that we use this process to realise the undoubted benefits of economic co-operation, and do not—by sticking mechanistically to specific criteria—commit the folly of plunging Europe more deeply into recession.

Mr. Spearing: Is my hon. Friend saying that the figures clearly laid down in the treaty, which provide little scope for interpretation, are not to be taken too seriously, and should be considered in the spirit of what is feasible in time? If he is saying that, is he not devaluing international treaties, and—as he may wish to do—devaluing the rigidity or scope of EC legislation as a whole? Customarily, statute in this country has been looked at rather differently.

Mr. Smith: I am attempting to point to those parts of the treaty that reinforce the case that we are making for a flexible interpretation of these criteria. I point again to article 104c. Paragraph 3 of that article says that

"The report of the Commission shall also take into account whether the government deficit exceeds government investment expenditure and take into account all other relevant factors, including the medium term economic and budgetary position of the Member State."

It is through those provisions, jointly with those in Europe who are similarly concerned about these matters, that I suggest that we can work to ensure that common sense prevails.

I underline also the fact that when people say, "No, don't sign the treaty and don't be part of the process of continuing economic co-operation in anything like this form" the consequences for employment in this country, if their view prevailed, would be serious indeed.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): What my hon. Friend seems to be saying is that the provisions of the treaty leading to the single currency are so absurd that they are unlikely to be workable in the time scale laid down. Does not my hon. Friend realise that the attempt to get there will do great damage, that it has already destroyed one socialist Government in France and that it is likely soon to destroy another socialist Government in Spain?

Mr. Smith: My argument is that slavish adherence to figures drawn up when a particular economic philosophy prevailed at the time that the treaty was negotiated should not be allowed to deflect European Governments, public opinion or parties within Europe from taking the path of what I believe to be economic common sense.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Although what the hon. Gentleman said about article 104c is correct—that flexibility is provided for—the plain fact is that article 104c also provides that if the Commission disagrees and says, "Sorry, we don't like flexibility", it could present a report to the Council and the Council, by a majority, could tell us what to do. If the hon. Gentleman looks at page 20 of the treaty, he will see that the article also provides for the Commission to say, "We're going to make an assessment, because we think you're wrong." The Council can not only tell us what to do; it can fine us and it can stop us using the European Investment Bank. It is all there in paragraph 11 of article 104c. There is no doubt about this. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, although there is flexibility over assessment, the Commission can refer the United Kingdom to the Council and that the Council, by a majority, can do terrible things to the United Kingdom, even though we may think that there is this flexibility?

8.45 pm

Mr. Smith: What the hon. Gentleman overlooks is the fact that these provisions are triggers for reports that have to be further discussed. They are part of an evaluation as to whether convergence has taken place sufficiently for economic and monetary union to happen. It is not a question of us having to do x, y or z. The article says that these are matters that are to be taken into account. The purpose of amendment No. 3 and new clause 1 is to set forth more clearly the concerns of this House that should prevail as this process takes place. We believe that the House, by means of this amendment and otherwise, should make it clear that we expect the British Government to interpret the application of these criteria in the light of the medium-term economic and budgetary position, in relation to both public capital investment expenditure and the laudable economic, social and environmental goals that are set out in article 2.

[Mr. Smith]

We do not believe that this assessment should simply be left to the Government. In amendment No.3 we propose that the House of Commons should have the opportunity to approve, or otherwise, the submission that the Government make to the Commission and to the European Council. Under the terms of new clause 1, that would apply not only to the assessment of the deficit criteria, which has preoccupied us so much in the debate so far, but to the co-ordination of economic policy in general.

In addition to the arguments that I have advanced relating to deficits, there is the wider, and important, principle of accountability to this House regarding economic policy. Crucial to the operation of the new clause is its reference to information supplied under article 13, paragraph 3, and the inclusion of the word "any" in the sixth line of new clause 1.

Article 103, paragraph 3, says that

"In order to ensure closer co-ordination of economic policies and sustained convergence of the economic performances of the Member States, the Council shall, on the basis of reports submitted by the Commission, monitor economic developments in each of the Member States and in the Community as well as the consistency of economic policies with the broad guidelines referred to in paragraph 2, and regularly carry out an overall assessment.

For the purpose of this multilateral surveillance, Member States shall forward information to the Commission about important measures taken by them in the field of their economic policy and such other information as they deem necessary."

That article thereby refers to all the information that ECOFIN requires in order to co-ordinate the economic policies of member states and the requirements on member states to submit key information about the economic measures that they are taking.

The inclusion, therefore, of the word "any" in new clause 1 means that all submissions to the Commission and Council, whether under the treaty requirements of general co-ordination of economic policy or under the excessive deficit procedure, would have to be based on reports taking account of the medium-term budgetary position, public investment and the article 2 goals. Those reports would need to receive the approval of this House.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman lays stress on the precise wording of new clause 1. The Minister said earlier that he had prepared some drafting amendments. Does the hon. Gentleman have them? If he does, why was he so surprised that the Minister accepted the new clause? If he does not have the amendments, would this not be a good time to ask what those drafting amendments are, since he lays such stress on the precise wording of the clause? Does the hon. Gentleman have the amendments, and what are they?

Mr. Smith: I have received a sheet of paper with Government amendments upon it. I had no indication from the Government that they intended to accept the new clause until the Financial Secretary said so. I was a little puzzled that no point of order was raised at the beginning of the debate, so I was by no means certain that the new clause would be accepted.

The effect of the drafting amendment is to change references to the treaty signed at Maastricht on 7 February to the treaties establishing the European communities. It is a technical change, which is very much in line with the amendments that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have tabled in a later grouping, to bring all references to the treaty in the Bill into line by the use of the same language. It does not alter the substance of our amendments. It certainly does not omit the word "any" in new clause 1, upon which, as the hon. Gentleman said, I place considerable weight.

Those reports would need to receive the approval of this House. Therefore, new clause 1 provides important safeguards, both over the interpretation of economic policy in the light of the treaty and over the democratic rights of this House. I hope that it will command the support of the House, which I hope will also be pleased to accept the Government's concession that they are unable to defeat either the arguments or the arithmetic and are therefore accepting that the new clause is to be part of the treaty. It will serve both the House and economic policy relating to Europe well. It will also enhance the effectiveness of that policy and, most important of all, democratic accountability.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I wish to make three general points and one in all sincerity to the Labour party. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) spoke courteously, kindly and fairly, but, as he is basing a great deal of his hope and optimism on article 104c, I hope that he will reread paragraph 11.

Although it is true that the Commission can have regard to many factors—that Britain has had a bad harvest, but is trying very hard, for example—if it comes to a different conclusion, it can put a report to the Council of Ministers and by a majority—not unanimously—the Council can instruct Britain to do all kinds of terrible things and can impose fines of an appropriate size.

We should give the Government credit for having been very clever in obtaining the exemptions set out on pages 114, 115 and 116. However, once the Commission has made a report, all kinds of terrible things can happen. Article 104c(1) states:

"As long as a Member State fails to comply with a decision taken in accordance with paragraph 9"—

by a majority vote—

"the Council may decide to apply or . . . intensify one . . . of the following measures:

—to require the Member State to publish additional information . . . before issuing bonds and securities;

—to invite the European Investment Bank to reconsider its lending policy;

—to require the Member State to make a non-interest-bearing-deposit of an appropriate size"

and

"to impose fines of an appropriate size."

The Labour party seems to be carried away with economic union because it believes that there is an element of flexibility. I hope that Labour Members will reread the treaty and accept that, sadly, flexibility is not as great for all member states as they believe. It is certainly easier for Britain because we have won many exemptions——

Mr. Shore: Is the hon. Gentleman also aware that, even at stage 2, we could suffer the very damaging effect of an adverse public report on the state of the British economy, long before the penal provisions relating to excess deficits come into effect? We all know how important confidence is in currencies and markets, and such a public report rebuking a particular member state would be designed to destabilise its Government.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The right hon. Gentleman is right. In fairness, one must point out that the protocol on page 115

refers to article 104c(1) from which the Government have won an exemption. However, the Commission can persuade the majority of member states to say, "Nothing doing. It is too bad, get lost."

Secondly, I hope that people will appreciate the fact that we must understand the obligation on member states to rejoin fixed exchange rates or the exchange rate mechanism. The Government have been successful in obtaining many exemptions. What I have read corresponds with what many people in the world of banking, many lawyers, accountants and clever people think, which is that Britain has an obligation to move towards rejoining the ERM and fixed exchange rates. However, such an obligation appears to be an obligation on member states aiming at stage 3. It would be helpful if the Government would make it abundantly clear, irrespective of their policy, whether, in their view, the treaty imposes an obligation to work towards fixed exchange rates or the ERM. We know——

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend has invited the Government to make it clear whether, in their view, there is an obligation under the treaty to work towards fixed exchange rates or membership of the ERM. The answer is no.

Sir Teddy Taylor: That is excellent news. I am glad that the Minister, for whom I have a high regard, has made that abundantly clear. I therefore hope that there is a possibility that the Government will accept, even if only in principle, new clause 32 which states that before the Government initiate

"the action required to conduct a single exchange rate policy based on the irrevocable fixing of exchange rates",

they will submit a report to Parliament, that Parliament shall discuss it and that it will then be sent to the Council of Finance Ministers.

Mr. Dorrell: That is exactly the Government's position. That is why provision for a further Act of Parliament before we move to stage 3 of economic and monetary union was made in the original text of the Bill.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am well aware of what happens at stage 3, but if the Government decided to move towards fixed exchange rates or to rejoin the ERM, would they, in addition to making the helpful concession that the Minister has just announced, state clearly—as new clause 32 states—that there would be a debate in the House of Commons and that the outcome of the debate would be reported to the European Commission? It is very important that the House of Commons should have another go at discussing the ERM or fixed exchange rates before we take such a fundamental step.

I agree with the many people who believe that fixed exchange rates and the ERM amount to monstrous economic lunacy. If 12 countries agree to fix their exchange rates together, many will have to create artificial prosperity or artificial depression. Sadly, most countries in Europe are having to create artificial depression. When Britain was unofficially in the ERM, under the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, we had to create artificial prosperity.

If the Government are to move back to fixed exchange rates, we ask that Parliament should at least have the opportunity to decide that and to express a point of view. The sending of a report to the EC would have no legislative consequence. As a gesture of good will, the Minister has accepted Labour's new clause and made a very helpful and reassuring statement. It would be helpful and would reassure many people in the Conservative party and some doubters in the Labour party if the Government could simply state that, before a specific policy was made to return to the fixed exchange rates of the ERM, irrespective of whether there is any particular obligation, there would be a debate in the House and that the House would be able to reach a decision. If the Government were to agree to that, it would remove much of the misunderstanding of and lack of sympathy with the Government's position. I therefore hope that it will be possible for the Minister to say that, before we make such a move, there will be a debate in the House.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my hon. Friend realise that his suggestion is extraordinary because it would mean that before the Government changed their monetary or exchange rate policy there should be a public debate in the House? Does he not realise the consternation that would be caused in the markets if we debated here whether to rejoin the ERM, on what terms and so on? Does he not appreciate that the conduct of monetary policy must therefore be left in the hands of the executive branch or—better still in my view—in those of an independent central bank? Such decisions can be announced to the world only when they have effectively been taken.

9 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry, but I do not agree with my hon. Friend. I do not speak as a parish pump populist; I am also a director of a bank with a good record of success and profits, and a director of a big insurance company which is also successful. Bearing in mind the additional unemployment, the misery and the costs brought about by the ERM decision—regardless of the details of how we may have entered the ERM at the wrong rate or at the wrong time—I believe that the vast majority of my constituents would be horrified if the Government decided to go back in, no matter what the clever bankers may say. My hon. Friend should remember that those clever bankers in whom he seems to have such confidence are the same people who said that if we joined the ERM we would have stability and growth. In fact, we had neither stability nor growth; we had misery, extra unemployment and huge extra costs. We must remember that all the money that the Government lost when we were trying to maintain our position within the ERM will have to be paid by my hon. Friend's constituents, and by my constituents, too. Many people have lost their houses and their jobs because of that appalling situation.

No matter what the details may be of how we should work out ERM parity, and how we should make the decision, surely the House of Commons should express its opinion on such a matter of policy before the Government make that further move.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I fear that my hon. Friend is confusing our membership of the ERM with the regime of high interest rates that would have been necessary anyway to cope with the inflationary problem that we faced two or three years ago. High interest rates were necessary to get inflation out of the economy and to re-establish stability and the possibility of the growth that we are now beginning to enjoy again, so they would have been

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

required in any event. Our membership of the ERM created the framework that gave additional credibility to that monetary policy at that time.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am astonished to hear my hon. Friend say that, because 99·9 per cent. of people in Britain accept that interest rates were high in order to maintain an artificial exchange rate. If that is not true, why did interest rates come down and down the moment that the artificial exchange rate was abolished? Ministers are saying in by-election campaigns, "Isn't it wonderful that Britain has the lowest exchange rates in Europe? Isn't that great? Isn't it wonderful that we now have an outlook for growth?" —and I am sure that the Financial Secretary would say the same thing. I am delighted about all that, but we should appreciate that the reason why that is so, and why poor old Germany and France are in such a horrendous mess now, is that they are still stuck with that accursed policy and we have managed to escape from it.

We can argue about the details, but if my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) thinks that interest rates were high simply because we were trying to choke inflation out of the economy, I am afraid that he is wrong. The high interest rates were required largely to try to maintain the artificial exchange rates. My hon. Friend has his views, and clearly he thinks that whatever happens, it will be good. Let us hope that his continual optimism will reassure him when he considers the appalling economic situation that we face. However, I hope that he will accept that there are differing views, and that some people may think that he is not 100 per cent. right.

It would be a terrific contribution to confidence not only in the Government but in the Opposition and in sterling if only the Government would say, "Before we decide to return to fixed exchange rates we shall have another full-scale debate, a decision will be made, and that will be that." That would be terrific, in view of the clear specific undertaking that the Minister has so kindly given that we are under no obligation under the Maastricht treaty to rejoin fixed exchange rates and the ERM.

My final point is about new clause 12, and the worrying philosophy under Maastricht of aiming for non-inflationary growth. I fear that that will become a deliberate policy of creating unemployment. I am afraid that all the signs are that paragraph 2 of article 3a will not encourage growth. There is no doubt that it will be a foundation not for growth but for higher unemployment. Professor Ormerod of the Henley Centre for Forecasting goes further and says that price stability is a recipe for unemployment.

The German people, understandably, are obsessed with inflation. I do not blame them for that. It must be a terrible worry for them to look back to the 1930s and see what happened to their country and their economy then. But because of that they seem to have an obsession, and the treaty sentences Britain and all the other states in the EC to follow the German policy of extremly low levels of inflation. I do not believe that low inflation is necessarily a basis for growth; unfortunately, the obsession with low inflation will create massive unemployment.

It is easy for us to cite figures on unemployment and inflation when the world is going through a particular problem, but there is no doubt that in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, the impact on unemployment and on inflation has been worse than in most other countries.

We could help the country if we adopted a policy that took all factors into account and faced the need to stimulate employment to the maximum possible level, while trying to keep inflation relatively low. At present, the Government are in a terrible financial mess, not because they are silly and nasty people but because they face horribly high unemployment. The costs of 3 million unemployed, apart from the misery and degradation for the people involved, are horrendous for the Government, who are having to borrow vast sums simply to meet those costs.

We need an economic policy that concentrates on increasing employment and reducing unemployment. I am genuinely terrified that if we go for the policy set out clearly in the Maastricht treaty—making the control of inflation the basic sole end of economic policy—we shall head into a period of high and rising unemployment. That will not be good for the people of Britain, for the happiness of families or for the Government as they try to control borrowing.

My remarks are not intended as an attack on Tory or Labour. The Front Benches of both parties think that, by and large, the Maastricht deal is good. Labour Members could be deluding themselves into believing that Maastricht will provide flexibility. That will not be the case. I hope that great thought will be given to the Maastricht obsession with controlling inflation and that the spirit of new clause 12 will be considered by the Government before they make final decisions.

I am glad that the House has been given an opportunity to examine my new clause 32. I have had the pleasure of having two proposals considered on Report, though I appreciate that we shall not vote on the issue. It would remove a great deal of fear in Britain about unemployment if the Government said, "Before we return to the absurd ERM policy, we shall have a rethink and discuss the matter again."

Putting aside detailed notes that I have been given, I conclude by reminding hon. Members of what is happening in politics. I am not seeking to score points when I say that the Government are unpopular just now. That is a well-known fact and there is no point hiding it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Thanks to you.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Lady is entitled to her view. I hope that she will also accept that—no thanks to me —the Opposition are not terribly popular either, even though a number of people may vote for them as a means of protesting against the Government.

People are saying that they are not happy with what the major parties are doing economically or with their policies to resolve the present terrible problems of unemployment, misery and lack of growth. It would be tragic if both Front Benches decided to go ahead with a policy based on obsession with inflation. That would not solve the basic problem of unemployment. I hope that the Government will give the clear commitment for which I ask, which is to have a rethink and debate of the ERM and reconsider the whole issue surrounding the principle of non-inflationary growth.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I shall speak to amendment No. 3, which has been grouped with new clause 1, which the

Government have accepted. I regret that amendment No. 3 will not be called for a Division and obviously we must accept the decision of Madam Speaker on that. It would have been interesting, had it been selected for a vote, to see the attitude of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) who, speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, said he would be coming along with us in spirit.

Before dealing with the amendment in some detail, I echo the concluding remarks of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). There is great danger now from a coalition of an entrenched economic policy in western Europe. In political terms, I suspect that it will do more damage to the parties on the left than to those on the right. Indeed, the damage is already in evidence, with some tragic consequences for all to see, in Spain, in France, in Germany even and perhaps in Italy. That entrenched coalition of economic policy is extremely dangerous and may lead to considerable upheavals in the not too distant future.

Amendment No. 3 was tabled in response to some debates in Committee when several of my hon. Friends chided those of us who are described as Euro-sceptics by saying that article 2 of title II of the treaty was a splendid article. They said that when we made all our speeches about doom and gloom, and excessive deficits, we should read article 2. Time and again, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East has hinged his economic arguments on the wording of article 2.

When some of us spoke of the difficulty of achieving sustainable and non-inflationary growth we were criticised and asked what was wrong with those aims. Of course, there is nothing wrong with them. When we said that the treaty said nothing about unemployment, we were told that article 2 mentioned high levels of unemployment, as if the two were somehow similar. As a result, we were stung into making our response and tried to draft some figures in amendment No. 3. I do not believe that we should have figures entrenched in the treaty, but some already are and it is only right that we should put some flesh on the bare bones of article 2, which sets out the laudable aims with which I think we all agree.

On Second Reading my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), who was then leader of the Opposition, rightly spoke about real convergence. When politicians or philosophers use the word "real" one has to be careful. We all know what we mean by real convergence. Apparently, for the Labour party, real convergence does not mean monetary or financial convergence, but the convergence of real things such as employment rates and regional disparities, which we want to remove. Those are matters of real convergence, which we understand.

Amendment No. 3 is an attempt—perhaps a clumsy one—to put figures on the bones of real convergence. The figures that we have chosen are fairly generous, as I shall try to show. They are not extremely arbitrary or completely unobtainable. They are obtainable if we believe in real convergence and are concerned with the goals and tasks set out in article 2.

Article 2 contains the phrase "sustainable and non-inflationary growth", which must be accompanied by a high level of employment. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East said that he was with us in spirit, but did not like the figure of 1·5 per cent. inflation, which he said was deflationary. As I tried to explain, that was an interesting statement. Our amendment does not take the figure of 1·5 per cent. in isolation. It seeks 1·5 per cent. inflation, 3 per cent. growth and a 5 per cent. level of unemployment—that package is not and cannot be deflationary.

The Financial Secretary has previously said that he is also in favour of sustainable and non-inflationary growth. When he was asked to name the country in western Europe that had achieved that goal over the past few years, he said that possibly Germany had. Perhaps it has, just about, but if one considers other indicators, there are problems in Germany. But let us have sustainable and non-inflationary growth—some of us believe that western capitals can probably never achieve growth and non-inflation. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East interprets and reinterprets those words in different ways. To me, non-inflation means no inflation. The only measure of inflation that we have is the consumer price index or the retail prices index. Presumably, non-inflation means zero in terms of the retail prices index or the consumer price index. Therefore, non-inflationary growth means no inflation and growth. It does not mean zero growth, but zero inflation plus growth.

We were generous and did not include 0 per cent. inflation in the amendment, but 1·5 per cent. We thought that we should give the Community a chance of obtaining the 1·5 per cent. goal. At the same time, it is fair to expect some growth, and 3 per cent. growth with 1·5 per cent. inflation is not fantastic either. To believe in non-inflationary growth it is necessary to believe in such figures. We are asking for that along with a 5 per cent. rate of unemployment. We are not asking for full employment: just 95 per cent. employment.

It is quite significant that the treaty does not talk about percentages of unemployment. The phrase high employment is really a monetarist term. As we tried to point out previously, it is a coded phrase. Anyone can agree on high levels of employment of 60 or 70 per cent. That represents 30 per cent. unemployment, but some people would say that it was a high level of employment. It all depends where we start.

The Labour party argument is that 5 per cent. unemployment or 95 per cent. employment is a high level. We do not expect to get back to full employment—those days are gone for a long time—but I should have thought that we would all agree that a level of 5 per cent. unemployment and 1·5 per cent. inflation and 3 per cent. growth would represent sustainable and non-inflationary growth.

9.15 pm

The amendment proposes that Britain shall not join a single currency or monetary union unless those factors have been achieved. Unless those indicators of real convergence were attained, we would not wish to join in a single currency or, by definition, economic and monetary union. I would hope that was Labour party policy.

I was rather disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East said that he was with us in spirit. I should have thought that he was with us in every word, every decimal point and every indicator in the amendment. Perhaps he is, but he is not allowed to say so.

I now turn to the phrase "economic and social cohesion". It can mean many things, but again it is fairly clear to Opposition Members. It is having levels of unemployment, levels of growth and per capita income

levels in different countries of western Europe which are more or less similar before we move towards a single, common currency.

We are concerned because we are in an extraordinary position. We shall have economic but not political union as there will be no central Government. I am not arguing for one and we shall return to the question of federalism, but there will be no central Government to adjust the consequences on the regions of a single currency. Therefore, we in the Labour party have to make sure that those criteria have been met before we enter the single currency. There will be no central Government, as we have in the United Kingdom, to create a mechanism to redress the problems caused by the centralisation of currency and a single currency.

We know what economic and social cohesion means. We are all in favour of it. The amendment seeks to set out certain figures. It states:

"no Community region will have experienced an average GDP per capita income of less than 65 per cent. of the Community average over the latest preceding three years".

That figure of 65 per cent. is pretty low; it is lower than some of us would have liked, but again we were trying to be helpful and to bring the Government Front Bench, if not the Financial Secretary, along with us. I think that the Financial Secretary is beyond the pale on these matters. He is a secret monetarist and believes in non-inflationary growth.

I do not know what the figures are for Greece and parts of Portugal; they are probably lower. Even in Mid Glamorgan the figure is only 70 per cent. at the moment. So 65 per cent. is perhaps too generous. But, in the spirit of compromise, that is what was put down.

We go on to say that for the United Kingdom the per capita income should not be less than 80 per cent., which I think is fair. The figure for Wales is 77 or 78 per cent. We are the poorest region in Britain. In Northern Ireland it is less than that. In the Republic of Ireland it is below 70 per cent. What we are saying here is that until at least the poorest regions of the United Kingdom are up to 80 per cent. of the Community average—Britain is now 90 per cent. of the average—no Government, no responsible Government and certainly no Government of the left should sign up to a single currency with all its consequences for the constituencies represented by my hon. Friends and certainly those in south Wales and in the old industrial parts of the United Kingdom. So again the figures are fairly reasonable.

We go on to mention unemployment and to allow a band of plus or minus 2 per cent. in respect of the regions. That is again perhaps too generous, but at least it shows what we would wish before signing up to a single currency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) had a bit of fun with this. When we come to the budget, he tried to call us federalists. It is a terrible way to describe us. We are not federalists at all, and I do not think that he is. I have never believed that this is a federalist treaty. It is not, nor will it develop in that way. It is a treaty for institutions and will be dominated by them, but that is perhaps another argument and another debate.

The point that we are making here is that the Community budget, which is a convergence budget, excluding the common agricultural policy—because the CAP is not redistributive; it can be, but it is not, as regards the different regions—should be equivalent to only 3 per cent. of the Community gross domestic product. The CAP takes about 1 per cent. If we add 3 per cent. to that, we are talking of a Community budget of 4 and possibly 5 per cent. Sir Donald McDougall, who has been quoted at length in the House, said in the 1970s, even before the accession to the treaty of Rome of Spain, Portugal and Greece, that it was necessary to have a Community budget of 7 per cent. of GDP to counteract the centralising forces caused by the structure of the Community. There was nothing federalist about that, nor is there about this. We are saying that member states should agree that the Germans and the French should pay a lot more.

Mr. Dorrell: I am listening carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. Will he clarify the position so that there is no doubt? Is he arguing that he would support a Community budget which was measured at 3 per cent. of Community GDP, the purpose of that expenditure being a wealth transfer from one member state in the Community to another? Is that a Community budget that he would support?

Mr. Davies: Yes. If we are moving towards economic and monetary union and if we are asked to accept the excessive deficits criteria and all the deflation and monetarism in this treaty, one must have it. It is not a question of whether I agree with it. I should have thought that everybody would agree with it. There we are, the hon. Gentleman is a secret monetarist. He is a hard man. He wants non-inflationary growth.

Yes, that is what we are saying. We should not move down that road, but, if we are to do so, it can only be done with this kind of contribution coming from countries such as France, Germany, Denmark and the richer countries of the European Community.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the right hon. Gentleman draw the attention of my hon. Friend on the Treasury Bench to the fact that we have operated a single currency and a single bank in the United Kingdom for nearly 300 years? That has required vast transfers of money and a mass movement of people from the poorer areas to the wealthier areas. The evidence is plain for anyone who wants to see it.

Mr. Davies: Indeed; that is the history of the 1930s and of the post-war period. Much as we may dislike the dominance of England, at least the safety valve that England offered the people of Scotland and south Wales existed—the cultures were not too different. The middle classes and the better educated professional classes may be able to move around Europe, but this sort of safety valve will not exist for people who work in factories and who live in poorer areas. Such a safety valve can exist only when there is a single Government of a homogenous country with a language and culture that are not too disparate.

I should like to turn the Financial Secretary's question round: is he saying that the Government would not make sure that the budget was of this size before moving to economic and monetary union?

Mr. Dorrell: I can certainly tell the House—the Government have done so on many occasions—that the Government do not regard the European Community budget as a kind of international social security budget. We support the development of a single market within the EC, because we see it as a most effective way of allowing

rich and poor areas of the Community to enhance their living standards by the creation of wealth in a competitive market.

Mr. Davies: We have a single market in the United Kingdom; there has been such a market including England and Scotland for 300 years, and including Wales for longer. There is no restriction on movement or on the type of goods that can be sold. That does not mean that we do not need a regional policy. Is the Minister really saying that in a single market such as the United Kingdom we do not need any way of redressing the balance as between the centre and the periphery? I hope not. Now the centre is moving further away—as is the periphery, by definition. That will certainly affect constituencies such as mine, others in Wales, and others west of the line drawn through the middle of Britain.

Mr. Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman might like to speculate about the reasons for the simultaneous reduction, over the past 10 years, in total Government expenditure on regional policy and the reduction in the gap in living standards between Wales and Scotland on the one hand and England on the other.

Mr. Davies: Not so. I know that the gap between Wales and the south-east of England has increased. Wales is now the poorest region. Whereas in 1979 we were fourth or fifth poorest, now we are bottom of the British league. In future, the Thames corridor—the area around Tower Hamlets down to docklands—because it looks towards Europe, will be further developed. With the advent of the channel tunnel, the single currency and the single market, the south-east of England will gravitate towards Europe, but the rest of Britain will suffer unless there are effective mechanisms for the transfer of income and wealth.

Mr. Marlow: Is it worth the right hon. Gentleman's while asking the Minister whether he thinks that, despite our spending less on regional policy in the United Kingdom, and standards of living and prosperity having come closer together, it is right to support the cohesion fund in the European Community?

Mr. Davies: The cohesion fund was part of the Danegeld—perhaps Spanish geld would be a more suitable term—that had to be paid to the Prime Minister of Spain.

Mr. Shore: The Financial Secretary seems to be ruling out for economic and monetary union any large transfers via regional policy. The clear implication is that he does envisage a mass movement of people right across the European continent, including hundreds of thousands of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish people moving to the central areas of Europe in order to find work.

Mr. Davies: I am not sure what the Financial Secretary meant or how he intended to ameliorate the effects of a union towards the centre. Where there is union between different parts of any country, a government of the centre has to use strong mechanisms to try to redress the problems. In this case there will not be a government but just a few institutions which will not be democratic. Every country understands that. It happens in the United States and in every civilised country. I thought that the Financial Secretary would have accepted that.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I are not far apart, but perhaps we are not putting our views in the same way. Does the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) agree that in Scotland, for example, under the Goschen-Barnett formula, spending per capita is far greater? That is one of the main reasons why there has been a substantial narrowing of the differences between various parts of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Davies: Regional transfers do not solve all regional problems, but they can ameliorate them. They are the only means governments have of ameliorating the centralising tendency.

9.30 pm

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the examples that he has given of the difficulties that might occur even if there were regional transfers. There may not be regional transfers, but even if there were, does he agree that the social and economic difference between Llanelli and London is much smaller than the similar geographical distance between London and Lille? If the centralising movement persists, there will be more difficulty between London and Lille than there has been between Llanelli and London.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the debate will not become so wide that it includes general regional policy. The amendments are specific.

Mr. Davies: I accept what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker. Economic and social cohesion is only one aspect of the amendment. I will shortly bring my remarks to a close. In the amendment we have listed the three main aspirations, goals or tasks contained in article 2—sustainable, non-inflationary growth, a high level of employment, and economic and social cohesion. Those are matters on which my right hon. and hon. Friends can agree. They are in article 2.

Before the United Kingdom considers adhering to a single currency and everything that that involves, those three matters should be dealt with. There may be an argument about the figures in the amendment, but we think that they are reasonable and sensible. If we had sustainable, non-inflationary growth, 95 per cent. employment, and economic and social cohesion we could consider rationally whether we wanted to sign up to a single currency. Until we reach that point, I do not believe that we can have a sensible debate. We owe that to our constituents, who remember what happened with the gold standard in the 1930s. Nothing changes in these matters. We are moving back to the thinking of the 1930s.

Europe has 17 million unemployed. Its growth rate is lower than that of Japan and America and far lower than that of the countries of the far east. Even without the Maastricht treaty, I cannot see how western Europe can perform as well; with the treaty it has not got a hope of doing so. That is why we hope to have the support of the Front Bench at least in word, if not in a vote. I hope that it will agree that the amendment is in accord with Labour party policy so that we may be united.

Mr. Leighton: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) has said, we are considering the convergence criteria of the treaty, which are appalling, certainly for a party of the left. They would cause great

[Mr. Leighton]

damage. In an intervention, I said that they had already destroyed the socialist Government of France. Soon they may destroy the socialist Government of Spain.

There has been no detailed discussion of those criteria in the House. No one has said how wonderful they are, and the advocates of the treaty do not seek to justify them. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen said in effect that they did not need to take any notice of them, and seemed to be rather shame-faced about the criteria. If the Government had proposed these convergence criteria in domestic politics, our Front-Bench spokesmen would have recognised them for the monetarist nonsense they are and would have opposed them. However, the prefix "Euro" confers almost a religious sense that a proposal has to be accepted.

People have been silent about the criteria and only my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli has sought to debate them. However, they have been debated in the European Parliament, because the European Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and Industrial Policy has written to the Select Committee on Employment of which I am a member. That committee wrote to us because of "continuously rising unemployment" and a

"wish to inform the wider public of what is at stake if allowed to continue".

The committee said that it had been consulted by the Council of Ministers about the attainment of the progressive convergence of economic policies and performance during stage 1 of economic and monetary union, the ERM. It looked at how the ERM was faring not only in this country but in the rest of the Community. It said:

"considering that the unemployment situation in the Community is becoming dramatic, with a rate of 11 per cent., or 17 million unemployed in 1993".

The situation is getting worse, because quite soon 20 million people in the Community will be unemployed. It continued:

"considering that these official figures seriously underestimate the real unemployment situation in the Community, as many Member States have programmes that delay or restrict registration".

That means that, under stage 1 of the ERM, there are 20 million unemployed in the Community. Western Europe is the world's unemployed black spot. The committee says that the Community

"risks sliding into recession, with growth forecasts being continually revised downward, most recently to 0·8 per cent. in 1993."

Matters have got worse since the committee told us that, because, under the ERM, western Europe faces zero growth.

The committee says that

"an average growth rate of 2·5 per cent. is necessary just to stabilise unemployment;".

Unless that growth is attained, we cannot reduce unemployment, but it says that, even if that growth rate could be attained, it would take until 1996 to reduce unemployment to its 1990 level of 8·3 per cent.

Let us examine what happened at the Edinburgh conference. The committee says:

"considering that the Edinburgh growth package is already incorporated in the Commission's growth forecasts, so that, without any additional measures, growth will continue to falter, and unemployment will continue to rise alarmingly."

The committee's letter then says:

"considering that Japan and the USA have already taken substantial steps to boost recovery".

But what of the EC? It then touches upon a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli. It says:

"considering that the Community budget is so limited in size that it cannot serve to deliver the necessary growth stimulus".

The Community is doing nothing.

The letter then says:

"considering Community industry is confronted with a continuing deterioration in competitiveness, due to relatively and absolutely high real interest rates, which cause European currencies to appreciate vis-à-vis our main competitors; according to the Annual Economic Report, the nominal effective exchange rates appreciated 10 percentage points between 1989 and 1992, causing a substantial loss of competitiveness to Community producers both in domestic and world markets, and consequently a continuous loss of market share over these years".

In other words, the high interest rates demanded by the ERM are crippling the European Community.

The committee's letter goes on to note with concern that the globalisation of world trade requires monetary co-operation at a world level, so even if the ERM were to work, that would not be enough. It says:

"considering that extremely high real interest rates, combined with imminent recession, threaten to cause a deindustrialization of Europe, because it is difficult to find industrial investment that promises a return of more than 6 or 7 per cent.".

The committee is talking about the deindustrialisation of the whole continent because the European economy is being suffocated and strangled by the ERM.

The committee says:

"considering that inflation is relatively low, and that the rate of capacity utilisation is now below 80 per cent., meaning that stimulation of the economy by lower interest rates or by other means might be absorbed without much immediate risk of inflation".

That is what should be done, but the ERM and the European Community treaty forbid that. The committee goes on to ask the Commission and the Council to recognise that unemployment and zero growth are a serious threat to the economic, social and political stability of the Community. That means that the convergence criteria, the ERM and stage 1 are crippling the Community, according to the Economic Committee of the European Parliament writing to the Select Committee on Employment.

That committee asks the Commission to draw up criteria for what it calls real convergence criteria. That means that the present convergence criteria are not real ones but only monetary criteria. They do not deal with wealth, output, labour costs, productivity, growth or investment. If the House agreed to the amendment spoken to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli, we would get real convergence.

The committee's letter asks

"Commission and Council to take urgent steps to enable interest rates to come down to levels comparable with those of our main competitors; considers this necessary not only to reduce the costs of private borrowing and of public debt, but also to stop the deterioration in our international competitiveness . . . Asks Commission and Council to consider reaching agreement with the US and Japanese authorities on 'target zones' for currency parities of the Dollar, Yen and ECU or DM in order to bring more monetary stability, fairer competition and better economic and monetary co-ordination between the major economic powers".

This shows that the ERM does not bring currency stability, because it does not bring stability to currencies outside Europe.

The committee then talks about the excessive deficit criteria defined in the Maastricht treaty. It says that

"increases in budget deficits resulting from economic recession should not in themselves lead to tax increases or public spending cuts which could damage long-term development and drive the European or national economy further into recession."

But that is exactly what is happening.

9.45 pm

The committee sent us an explanatory memorandum which states:

"Governments are sticking to a narrow conception of the route to fulfilment of the convergence criteria of EMU, which could have been achieved in the high growth environment of the late eighties, but in the present environment of economic stagnation serves only to reinforce deflation, aggravate public finance problems and therefore threaten the goal of EMU. Changed circumstances demand a change in policy."

That is what we want—a change in policy. We want a change along the lines of the amendment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli. We know that we are not getting that, but a committee of the European Parliament tells us that that is necessary.

The central bank has one aim which is price stability. On that, the committee says:

"Economic policy solely directed at monetary stability at a time of stagnating growth and accelerating unemployment reinforces the economic downturn and increases unemployment still further . . . unemployment will grow further, revenues will go down, unemployment-related expenditure will go up, increasing the discrepancy with the core EMU variables (3 per cent. budget deficit and 60 per cent. Government debt)."

The committee goes on:

"The least we can ask of our governments is that they should not make things worse."

But that is exactly what is happening as a result of stage 1 of economic and monetary union.

Here is something for us to think about. The committee says:

"Paradoxically, Germany with its relatively high inflation rate has the lowest real interest rate in Europe . . . As a consequence of the monetary policy in the EMS framework, many Member States have lower inflation but consequently higher real interest-rates than the EMS-anchor currency, the Deutsch-Mark. France, for example, with a much healthier economic situation than Germany, has a prohibitive real interest rate of 7·7 per cent., while Germany has 4·6 per cent. The implication is clear: to have a lower inflation rate than Germany is no longer an advantage, and this perverse effect of monetary orthodoxy on the price of capital in Europe should provide food for thought for Europe's governments and economists."

The committee is telling us that it is not wise to have a lower inflation rate than Germany because that means that real interest rates are higher.

The committee says:

"the French Franc is at serious risk . . . not because the French Franc is not healthy, but because French industry would not survive the suffocating high interest rates."

That is what Mr. Beregovoy found. He supported the policy of the strong franc and the orthodox monetary policies and it lost him the election. I hope that some hon. Members will think about those things.

I come to the last point—an opinion of another committee on regional policy and regional planning. It says:

"It could reasonably be asked if the hardnecked insistence by the Commission and the official position of the Council to continue the policies prescribed by the convergence criteria required for the realization of EMU is the right policy."

The committee is asking that question of us.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Like other hon. Members, I have listened with much interest to what my hon. Friend has been saying and quoting from the economic committee of the European Parliament. Its criticisms are valid, but I find it puzzling that while it makes a valid criticism of the treaty, convergence and the rest, time and again we are told that we should be supporting the Maastricht treaty. MEPs find it difficult to understand our criticisms. Why are they so keen on a treaty when their own economic committee rightly makes legitimate and valid criticisms of the whole nonsense and poisonous set-up that would result if the treaty is ratified?

Mr. Leighton: I suppose that the committees still support the treaty, but they are debating the real convergence criteria and getting down to the detail—which is something that we have not done. The committees are saying that the ERM, with the high interest rates that it brings, is suffocating and strangling the western Europe economy, bringing rising mass unemployment and zero growth. They are learning from experience and saying that is not the way forward.

The committee adds:

"It could be reasonably asked if the hardnecked insistence by the Commission and the official position of the Council to continue the policies prescribed by the convergence criteria required for the realisation of EMU is the right policy."

That question ought to be asked. I do not know whether my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench are asking it. It seems that they are not, and that they are going along with all this uncritically. The people of western Europe, however, are beginning to question the right way forward.

The committee goes on:

"The great problems created by German Unification are a striking demonstration of economic realities and not just a theoretical case study of what is likely to happen if no structural measures are enacted."

It is saying that here is a laboratory experiment of monetary union. The idea seems to be that one can embrace monetary union without worrying about real convergence and examining productivity, labour and wage costs. The committee examined the situation in Germany and found that, at a stroke, the whole of east Germany's industry had been wiped out. All the east German workers are on strike. Our attention is being drawn to those matters.

The committee asks the Commission and the Council

"to recognise that the ERM discipline required for EMU necessitates greater economic sacrifices from the more peripheral economies."

It is saying that Wales, Scotland and other peripheral areas will suffer—that monetary union helps the strong and efficient, but that the weak will go to the wall.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene again. If the European Parliament's economic committee is so critical, rightly, why are the majority of MEPs—unfortunately, Labour as well as Tory—almost begging the House to support a treaty that, apart from undermining the basic role of the House of Commons, would cause so much harm and injury to the British people? What possible logic is there in MEPs backing such a treaty?

Mr. Leighton: There seems to be hardly any logic in that, but I suppose that my hon. Friend's question should

[Mr. Leighton]

be put to the MEPs. I hope that they will pay some attention to the committee's words. It asks the Commission and the Council

"to recognise that unemployment and zero growth are a serious threat to the economic, social and political stability of the Community".

The ERM has brought zero growth, stagnation, and rising mass unemployment, and the committee points out that that puts at risk the Community's stability. That is the point to which present policies have brought western Europe.

The committee also asked the Commission

"to draw up criteria for real convergence in the EC."

That recognises that, at present, we have monetarist criteria, not the criteria for real convergence. The only mention of that was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli.

Appalling damage is being done by the convergence criteria, and by stage 1 of economic and monetary union. We have escaped for the moment; we have been able to secure a more competitive pound and to reduce interest rates by 4 per cent., and I am told that as a result the economy is looking up. Given, however, that the criteria have brought mass unemployment, stagnation and zero growth to western Europe, I do not see how we can possibly vote for them.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I support the new clause and amendments. The Government have accepted new clause 1, subject to a certain amount of re-wording. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) commented on the triumph and the victory that we had achieved, with the Government quaking in fear of our votes. It must be said, however, that none of the reports received by Parliament or any other institution is of much use against the wording of the treaty.

That wording is quite specific, especially in regard to the deficit and convergence questions that form the stuff of the amendments. The treaty spells out economic policies and strategies that are bound to be deeply deflationary, and particularly damaging to this country—to the weaker, more peripheral economy that will suffer most from the deflationary processes. The reason is clear. Those who have launched the drive for unity in Europe have found that, as they cannot gain support from the people in referendums and cannot secure agreement from Governments—that becomes a horse-trading procedure—the only possible route is via monetary union.

The logic is simple: monetary union leads inevitably to a single Government. That process started with the exchange rate mechanism and is continuing with economic and monetary union, which is the core of this treaty. Central banks, however, will agree to that being the driving, motive force—the dynamic of union—only if it is done on their terms. Those terms, being the terms of central bankers, are deflationary; that is why deflationary proposals are written into the machinery of convergence. The criteria relating to low inflation, public-sector deficit and the ratio of debt to gross national product are the criteria that central bankers want, and the criteria that amendment No. 3 seeks to relax. The central bankers want them to be included because their approach is monetarist.

Mr. Shore: It is worth recalling that it was the central bankers' committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Delors, that wrote the whole draft of economic and monetary union. This is indeed a bankers' charter. The most extraordinary thing of all is that it should have been presided over by a self-proclaimed socialist French former Minister. I find that amazing.

Mr. Mitchell: I do not find the outcome amazing, given the central bankers, but I find it amazing that the process should have been presided over by a socialist, whose party has now reaped the inevitable reward of the consequences of those policies.

The terms set out in the treaty are simply not acceptable to the Labour party, or to anyone who believes in the policies advocated by the Opposition. We have made clear our reservations about the ERM, and our opposition to EMU, in a series of documents passed by the Labour party conference, starting with "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". We also made our stance clear in a successor document, whose name I forget: such documents became a bit like Chinese meals at one time, as the policy was modified continually. It was also set out in a statement by the national executive in October 1991. This was before Group 4 took over as the custodian of Labour party policy and allowed it to wander off to Brussels—before it was clause 4 rather than Group 4 policy.

That statement made it clear that monetary union was possible only on two firm bases. Those bases are, first, a convergence in the strength, power, industrial might, productivity, investment, and dynamics of the economies and, secondly, a fairly massive machinery for redistribution. I do not refer to a minimal distribution. Amendment No. 3 contains moderate and cautious proposals. Its redistribution proposals are far more modest than those suggested by the McDougall committee in 1970, which recommended that 7·5 per cent. of Europe's gross domestic product should be redistributed if there was to be monetary and economic union. The proposed proportion——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business)

That, at this day's sitting, the European Communities (Amendment) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 279.

Division No. 255] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Aitken, Jonathan	Bellingham, Henry
Alexander, Richard	Beresford, Sir Paul
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Blackburn, Dr John G.
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*	Booth, Hartley
Alton, David	Boswell, Tim
Amess, David	Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Ancram, Michael	Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Arbuthnot, James	Bowden, Andrew
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bowis, John
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Ashby, David	Brandreth, Gyles
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Brazier, Julian
Aspinwall, Jack	Bright, Graham
Atkins, Robert	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*	Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Browning, Mrs. Angela
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*	Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*	Burns, Simon
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Burt, Alistair
Bates, Michael	Butler, Peter
Batiste, Spencer	Butterfill, John

Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael

Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

As amended, again considered.

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Now that the Liberals have voted again as the party of open government, to do the dirty deed in the middle of the night, we can proceed apace into the night. I was saying before the interruption—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are holding conversations be good enough to hold them outside the Chamber? Hon. Members who are leaving will please do so now, and quickly: we have business to conduct.

Mr. Mitchell: As I was saying—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members who are leaving must do so quickly and quietly.

Mr. Mitchell: I was saying earlier that the Labour party had over the years developed and refined its position on monetary union and had made it clear that monetary union could be deeply damaging.

As part of that process of developing our position on monetary union, we have made it absolutely clear that monetary union will be deeply damaging, even ruinous, for our economy unless two basic conditions are fulfilled. They are that there must be real convergence of the economy, which means convergence in terms of economic strength and power, and/or—it is not clear whether they are mutually exclusive, but it certainly needs to be

accompanied with—a massive system of redistribution to help the weaker economies that are bound to be damaged and drained by the process of monetary union.

The scale of that redistribution will have to be massive because while we have a single currency and a nation state, a nation state redistributes, in terms of public spending, about 40 per cent. of its gross domestic product. Europe redistributes perhaps 1 per cent. of the GDP of Europe, and that is totally inadequate as a machinery for offsetting the divergences that will develop through monetary union.

Even the McDougall committee in the 1970s recommended that the proportion of GDP should be increased to about 7·5 per cent., and that was before the entry of Spain, Portugal and Greece. So it considered that a much bigger process of redistribution had to occur if monetary union was not to be deeply damaging. If defence responsibilities are included, that figure would almost certainly be more than 10 per cent. If Spain, Portugal and Greece are included, more than 12·5 per cent. of Europe's GDP would need to be redistributed to offset the consequences of monetary union.

The Labour conference and the Labour party's national executive could have added a third condition. It could have said that, to offset the consequences of monetary union, one would need total mobility of labour within the EEC so that labour, as well as capital, could move to where the jobs were. We have not got, in any sense, the sort of mobility that would allow British workers to go to Europe to find jobs as the economy declines and is drained by monetary union.

Without those conditions, particularly the first two, it is inevitable that monetary union—the merger of two economies at different degrees of development and strength—will be ruinous for the weaker economy. It is not putting it too strongly to say that the weaker economy in that union would be ripped apart, just as if when one merges two drive rods the stronger one rips apart the weaker. We, as the weaker economy, would be ripped apart by the process.

When setting out the conditions for and reservations about monetary union, the Labour party conference and the national executive were being fairly cautious. I personally believe that monetary union itself will be more than damaging; it will ruin our economy, but be ultimately impossible. The currency is like the atmosphere around the planet—it sustains independent economic existence on that planet and cushions it from shocks from outside so they can be taken on the exchange rate, not jobs. If one drains the atmosphere, one drains away the element that cushions the planet from shocks and abrasions from outside, and the inflation or deflation of other planets—or economies.

The national executive says that monetary union is possible only on those two conditions. I say that monetary union, in itself, is impossible as there is no way of achieving it. Either one moves to monetary union quickly, which results in instant East Germany, with all the damaging consequences that have ensued, or one moves to monetary union slowly, which means moving back to the exchange rate mechanism. One has to have a convergence of currencies, which means a slow process of industrial anorexia for the weaker economy—ours. The quick process to monetary union is disastrous and immediately ruinous, the slow process is ruinous over the long term as it drains away the industrial economy. We know the consequences of the exchange rate mechanism because we have been there and been through the inevitable processes in that form of convergence.

Fox hunting is described as the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable. Those who pursue the mirage of monetary union are the uncomprehending in pursuit of the unobtainable. I do not see how my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East can say, "Never mind the words, feel the spirit—feel the surge to unity." Our supporters, voters and electors—the section of society that supports the Labour party—do not have the same Euro-enthusiasm as our Front-Bench team.

By what will we ultimately be bound? We will be bound not by what my hon. Friend says is in the treaty or how he interprets it, but by the words of the treaty. In the words of the Rubaiyat, the Maastricht process writes,

"and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it."

That is the position that we would be in if we agreed to that union. I share my hon. Friend's hopes and enthusiasm, but it is very unlikely that they will materialise.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Did my hon. Friend see the excellent article in yesterday's edition of *The Guardian*? It drew parallels with the present treaty, which seems to try to replicate the period closest to ours—when we were all tied to the gold standard in the run-up to the first world war. That led to 5 per cent. of the British population emigrating because of its deflationary consequences. We are not just talking about tears; after the best part of two years of being locked into the exchange rate mechanism, the majority of people in Britain would like to emigrate if they could.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is perfectly right: that would be the consequence.

The general argument is clear. In the words of Aneurin Bevan, "Why look in a crystal ball when you can read the book?" The text is there and it is quite specific. That is why amendment No. 3 tries to set out more realistic terms of convergence.

The treaty is absolutely specific. The procedure for reporting on the British economy starts before we reach stage 2. According to the treaty, the reporting begins even before we reach stage 2. It starts by assessing

"the progress made with regard to economic and monetary convergence, particularly with regard to price stability and sound public finances, and the progress made with the implementation of Community law concerning the internal market."

It starts before stage 2 and it gets harder and tougher all the time. We end up with all the power of a rate-capped council to control its expenditure.

Article 104 is quite specific, and that is why we are attempting to soften it by our amendment. It states:

"the Council may decide to give notice to the Member State to take, within a specified time limit, measures for the deficit reduction which is judged necessary . . . in order to remedy the situation . . . The Council may decide . . . to require the Member State concerned to publish additional information . . . to invite the European Investment Bank to reconsider its lending policy . . . to require the Member State to make non-interest-bearing deposits of an appropriate size with the Community".

It sets out the whole process of reporting, fining and censure.

We should think what the very mention of a report, the very possibility of such criticism and censure will have on

[Mr. Mitchell]

confidence, particularly when the Government are trying to borrow £55 billion to cover their deficit, if we are faced with the rumours of censure from Brussels. What effect will it have on markets and currency speculation? We are exposing ourselves to that possibility by accepting the obligations in the treaty.

We are facing economic difficulties—and that is the importance of amendment No. 32, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). The Government are behaving schizophrenically. On one hand, they are pursuing a policy of competitive devaluation to break out of the ERM corset and the constraints that it imposed on us. That policy has been successful. The only success that the Government had was when they were forced to take up the policy of competitive devaluation. However, at the same time they are putting back the straitjacket of controls of the exchange rate mechanism. That is totally schizophrenic.

What is industry to make of the prospects for investment? Is it to seize the opportunity of competitive devaluation and expect a continuously competitive currency and on that basis it will be successful in exporting to world markets? How can it if at the same time the Government are putting back the straitjacket of all that is implied in stage 2 and the uncertainties of whether we move to stage 3? We know that that will bring us back into alignment. What is industry to make of that? Will the Government go back into the exchange rate mechanism, with all the disasters that ensued, or will we be able to remain competitive?

A *Financial Times* editorial last week stressed the need for an economy in a state of deficit to keep the currency continuously competitive. The Government are totally ambiguous in their proposals.

The Minister has said in writing to me and other hon. Members and again from the Front Bench today that there is no obligation in the treaty or in stage 2 to return to the exchange rate mechanism. That is true. But we must look beyond the formal provisions. The whole emphasis of the treaty and all the processes of stage 2 are about convergence. We will take part in all those processes until we give notice that we are not moving to monetary union.

I ask hon. Members to think of all the pressures that will be on us once we have signed the treaty and once we have signed up for that kind of process. It is not only the external pressures. I ask hon. Members to think of all the internal pressures, of that fifth column of Euro-enthusiasts, of people in the City, who will be telling us that we must get into monetary union, we must stick by our commitment and we must go ahead, otherwise the bank will not come here, investment will not come here, all those Japanese firms that are going to invest here will not come after all, and we cannot be left behind. That will be the argument and we shall be back in the debate on which we spent so long before we eventually joined, with such disastrous consequences, the exchange rate mechanism. The argument will again be clamorous, and it will be much more high-octane and high-powered. So we will have internal division and external pressure.

Mr. Winnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that Ministers are apparently trying to sell the treaty to their own supporters on the basis that it will not come to pass, that it is all exaggerated, that it will not really mean anything and that, once Parliament approves it, that will be the end of it? Is not my hon. Friend right in emphasising that those who are responsible for the treaty will make sure that economic convergence will come and that it will be implemented precisely as stated in article 104c and elsewhere?

10.30 pm

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Government will have to move down that path, certainly down the path of stage 2, and they will have to signify at an early point on stage 3. That is not only because of what is in the treaty. As my hon. Friend said, they have opted for a policy of bamboozlement. The Prime Minister's preferred policy position is to keep all his balls in the air at any one time, and that is what they are trying to achieve in this process of bamboozlement about the treaty.

The opt-out from monetary union is the Government's figleaf. What is the point of the opt-out when the whole of the treaty is about monetary and economic union? What good does the opt-out from the central core of the treaty do? I have no doubt that, while the opt-out is there to keep the Conservative party as united as it can be—and it will not be very united in any circumstances—once the treaty is signed, the position will change, as the Prime Minister indicated just a couple of weeks ago in the first flush of success at getting the Bill through Committee, to a degree of Euro-enthusiasm, and Britain will go down that road.

It is bound to go down it by the treaty. Let us take the second paragraph of article 3a:

> "Concurrently with the foregoing, and as provided in this Treaty and in accordance with the timetable and the procedures set out therein, these activities shall include the irrevocable fixing of exchange rates leading to the . . . single currency".

Those words are specific, and European law is bound by the preambles; the lawyers interpret it in the light of the preambles. We shall be vulnerable to pressure.

A Government subject to that preamble, with all the qualifications in the treaty and all the impositions of the treaty, will be unable to get away as blithely as they have done with a competitive devaluation which must be sustained to keep British industry growing and to expand our industrial base so that it becomes viable again. That demands a prolonged period of sustained competitiveness which we cannot have if we are to be subjected to continuous nagging pressure from Europe to get back into the exchange rate mechanism and to go along with the other member states.

It is even worse than that. The barrister, Martin Howe, has argued lucidly and logically in a pamphlet that not only would we be vulnerable to pressure—which would be real enough because we should be out of line with everybody else and they would want us to get back and be as miserable as them, abandon our competitive advantage and abandon the benefits that we have received from it—but we should be liable to legal action at the European Court to take us back into the exchange rate mechanism unless we went there. I have not heard that argument rebutted or even challenged from the Government Front Bench. If we are to have this treaty, they have an obligation to tell us what they think of that argument.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Give way and let the Minister answer.

Mr. Mitchell: I am happy to give way to the Minister.

Mr. Dorrell: I have said more than once in correspondence with the hon. Gentleman that the position in the treaty is made quite clear, both in the text of the statute on the European Monetary Institute, as regards stage 2, and as regards our own position under our protocol in stage 3, that unless and until a member state becomes a fully fledged member of stage 3 of economic and monetary union monetary policy remains the responsibility of the institutions of the member states. That cannot be reconciled with any implied or express obligation to join the ERM.

The position is clear: for Britain, during stage 2 and until we join stage 3, our capacity to determine our own monetary policy is safeguarded in absolute terms by the treaty.

Mr. Mitchell: That is certainly the Government's position, but it ignores the distinction between monetary policy of the ERM as well as in the treaty to move on to the ERM; it ignores the continual political pressure that will be brought to bear on us to be good Europeans; and it ignores the preamble. The Government do not seem to understand the workings of the European Court. Faced with a British Government who try to maintain a competitive edge for a long time, what will our competitors do? They will haul us before the European Court, and there we will be vulnerable. That court will be bound by the treaty, and by the preamble in particular.

The penchant, the inclination, of the European Court is to further union. It is not an impartial body——

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is neither a penchant nor an inclination. The court will be bound by the need to interpret the treaties in relation to the original treaties and subsequent treaties. They are not something that the court thought up: they are the only reason why the court exists.

Mr. Mitchell: I only wish that I had my hon. Friend's directness of mind and approach. I was skirting round the issue, using French words like "penchant". The court is an instrument of unity; it will be forced to act as I have described, and the conditions for doing so are explicitly set out in the treaty.

Mr. Dorrell: The court is not an instrument of unity; it is an instrument for interpreting the treaty. And the treaty that it would be asked to interpret says, at article 3 of the EMI statute, that the powers of the EMI are

"without prejudice to the responsibility of the competent authorities for the conduct of monetary policy within the respective Member States".

So much is clear. Furthermore, the United Kingdom's protocol states that if the protocol is activated the United Kingdom

"shall retain its powers in the field of monetary policy according to national law".

That is what the European Court would be asked to interpret. It is plain and beyond dispute.

Mr. Mitchell: That brings us to the arguments about our being bound by the imperatives of stage 2, as set out in the treaty, even before the protocol is activated. I have already mentioned the irrevocable fixing of exchange rates, which is what the treaty is all about. That is the sort of issue that the court would take into account when interpreting the treaty.

The Government are attaching themselves to a figleaf in the hope that they can get away with all this. Politically they cannot, because the pressure will be on them to show themselves good Europeans—and there will be legal pressures to abandon the competitive advantage that we have gained by leaving the miseries of the exchange rate mechanism.

I fear that reports to Parliament are a fragile weapon compared with the power and might of the treaty, but the amendments are at least at attempt to safeguard ourselves from the deflationary pressures that lie in store for us if we accept a treaty that has deflation at its core. It is the cancer at the heart of the treaty. It is explicitly written into the text, and it would be disastrous for the people whom I represent.

I am not in politics to give powers to unaccountable central bankers or to aim at zero inflation. That has never been the objective of the Labour party, of socialists, or of anyone who wants a better society and full employment. These aims will be damaged by the deflationary techniques deployed in the treaty. It would be disastrous not only for Labour, for our people and for the parts of the country that we represent, but for Europe. The people of Europe will not be made enthusiastic about Europe by being put out of work.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I am grateful for the fact that I was able to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. I failed to do so during the latter proceedings in Committee.

I support new clause 12 which I regard as the key to the issue. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said that Conservative Back Benchers were told by the Government that Maastricht was a meaningless affair because it would never happen. But Maastricht is already under way in the sense that the British public are paying for it. The hands of the European Community are in our pockets. By that, I mean that there are only two major net contributors to the Community as it exists—Germany by a large margin and ourselves; the French seem to break even, more or less. It is important that the House makes the decisions and scrutinises all future steps to economic integration.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby has spoken eloquently about the central bankers who will be running economic integration. That is not just the first step towards federalism; it is a considerable step down the road. Yet when we examine what Maastricht means and how new clause 12 would put a brake on the less palatable aspects of Maastricht, we cannot deny that we will be passing over sovereignty in a range of areas and passing over powers from the House to faceless bureaucrats and central bankers in Europe. Above all, we will be paying for it because we will be putting money into the European cohesion fund. Our voters will be required to pay; yet they will never have an opportunity to kick out the institutions at the heart of the treaty.

In my understanding, convergence means that at some stage in future there will be economic union in which we will all be subject to the same currency. The idea that the economies of the emerging eastern bloc countries that intend to join the European union will remotely converge with our economy is fantasy. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Albania will apply in the not-too-distant future to join the European union. It is fantasy that the Albanian economy should be even remotely connected with our economy. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and some other countries are looking enviously at the European union. Who can blame them? In my judgment, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right in seeking to deepen the European union and not to make it a rich men's club, which, in essence, it is in danger of becoming.

I regard the European union as the free trade club for which I campaigned in the early 1970s. If new clause 12 were accepted, it would at least give the House control over our own destiny and our own affairs. I am wildly enthusiastic about a free trade club, but I draw the line at a federal structure. If we are to talk about an integrated economy and cohesion in future, we must learn to get along together under the existing regime.

In a straightforward way, there are three criteria by which to judge whether the European Community is working. First, I should like to know whether my Devon fishermen may fish in French waters. The answer is simply that they may not. Secondly, a useful way to judge European union is to see whether a British business man operating in Europe can fly with British Airways between, say, Madrid and Rome. He cannot, and that is not a level playing field. British Airways will not be able to pick up passengers from second countries and fly them to third countries until 1997 at the earliest. That is another criterion on which European union fails. The third matter is straightforward. Many business men, especially in Devon, rely on cellular telephones. It is extraordinary that cellular telephones used in England cannot be used on the continent. European-wide allocation of frequencies would make life much easier.

Those three criteria show that there is not a single market. I am an enthusiastic European and I should like to see a single market, a free trade club, but that is not on offer in the Maastricht treaty. New clause 12 will at least enable the House to curb the power of Ministers and those who will take decisions without consulting the electorate.

It is surely fantasy to believe that there can ever be a completely agreed, integrated foreign or security policy. A few years ago, there was a most blatant and obvious example of aggression in the Gulf in which the aggressor and the innocent party were perfectly obvious. Could Europe agree on a foreign policy? No, it could not. If we cannot get agreement in those circumstances, what are the chances in future?

10.45 pm

Mr. Winnick: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that those who are most enthusiastic about the treaty and who may be in a minority—I mean not those who support the Government in the Lobby but enthusiasts such as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath)—believe that the treaty lays the basis for a federal Europe? When challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) to say whether a single currency would mean a single Government, the right hon. Gentleman said yes and was quite happy about it. Although, for obvious reasons, the word "federal" is not included in the treaty and the Government minimise the issue, the treaty is the basis for a federal Europe. Apart from anything else, it would certainly diminish and undermine the whole purpose of the House of Commons.

Mr. Allason: I do not often agree with the hon. Gentleman, but on this occasion I endorse what he says. A few days ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was asked about the consequences of political and economic union when he took this country into the European Community. I was surprised to hear him brush that aside and clearly say, "That was always the intention."

I fear that there is a hidden agenda. I campaigned for this country to join the European Community, and I do not regret that because it is unquestionably in our long-term interests to be able to operate within a European trading bloc. I am enthusiastic about a free trade club, but I do not subscribe to the hidden agenda of European economic and political integration.

People become vague and their words become fuzzy when they are pressed to define exactly what is meant by political integration. I want decisions made in this Parliament, which must remain sovereign. If we allow our economic future to be determined by faceless bankers in Frankfurt, we shall store up a great deal of trouble for ourselves.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is not what will happen exactly what happened when the fishermen felt that they had been badly treated and that no one was listening to their complaints?

There will be direct action rather than parliamentary action. Is that not a much greater worry than the idea that, somehow or another, we will be left behind?

Mr. Allason: I do not want to be drawn down that avenue because I have strong views on the rights of our fishermen to be able to operate, if not on a level playing field, at least on a level ocean with European fishermen. That illustrates the point that there is not equal enforcement. My fishermen in Devon would be pleased to comply with tying-up regulations and the controlling of catches if they believed for one moment that such regulations would be equally enforced across the rest of Europe. The difficulty for my fishermen is that they can use a pair of binoculars and see on the horizon French fishermen busy catching what they regard as their fish. That is an unacceptable view of Europe.

There are only two arguments for Maastricht. One is that there will be greater European enforcement of regulations. The second is that if we keep quiet and agree to Maastricht, the EFTA countries will be stupid enough to join in and they will then foot the bill because they will be net contributors, along with us and the Germans.

New clause 12 gives the House the opportunity to scrutinise all future decision making in relation to economic and monetary policy. If the House is to continue to command the respect of the electorate, and if the electorate is to continue to believe that it has the final say over who comes to the House and who decides taxation policy, it is essential that new clause 12 and all the amendments that limit and control the impact of the Bill are passed into law.

Mr. Hain: I found the comments of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) interesting because they were rather schizophrenic. He praised the free market in Europe as, almost without exception, Tory Members do, but he did not accept that the logical consequence of that is a free market in money as well. If one wants free trade and a free market for business, one needs, as a conclusion of that process, a free market in capital and money, and one ends up with monetary union, which is the agenda of the right.

I find it puzzling that many socialists have gone along with that. For me, the problem with the Maastricht treaty is not the movement towards political unification or social cohesion, but the fact that it imposes a monetarist agenda on Europe. The key is not the social chapter or measures such as additional reporting mechanisms for Parliament to scrutinise the economic developments in Europe, welcome though they are. The key is the way in which Maastricht's monetarist agenda imposes deflation on members' economies at a time when they desperately need the opposite.

The policies being developed through Maastricht are like relying on leeches to cure a fever. They impose rigid economic constraints, the most notable being restricting the public sector deficit to 3 per cent. of GDP and insisting that total public debt must not exceed 60 per cent. of GDP.

The constraints and convergence criteria are not permissive and flexible, contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said. They are extremely rigid. Article 104c, on page 19, makes it clear that member states shall avoid breaches of those monetary and fiscal constraints. In addition, paragraph 11 of article 104c on page 20, says that punishments will be imposed. A kind of European state capping will be imposed if member states do not conform to achieving the objectives. Those are all well described in the Maastricht treaty.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will not that pose a considerable problem for Belgium and Italy, because, as I understand it, last year the Belgians' debt was 120 per cent. of GDP and the Italians' 105 per cent? Does the hon. Gentleman think that those two countries will slash their public expenditure in half or double their taxation in the next three years during which time they must decide whether to enter phase 3? Surely that casts doubt on the capacity of the EC to come together as suggested in the Maastricht treaty. Therefore, does not that emphasise even more the wise decision of my right hon. Friends in going for the opt out from this monetary union?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. He could point to other countries. Virtually no country in the EC at present satisfies, or is anywhere near satisfying, all the convergence criteria. However, the hon. Gentleman does not mention that virtually all of them are trying to do so and are seeking to go down that road. But consider the consequences. Europe now has massive unemployment which is threatening social stability and cohesion and causing a rise in racism. In the end, if the process is proceeded with, as Maastricht will ensure that it is, it will bring down Europe and the prospects of European unification.

If the convergence criteria are flexible, why are they framed in such clear, legally defined, specific terms in the treaty? It is illogical to argue that they could be flexible. Why should France, at huge cost to its economy, Ireland, at huge cost to its economy with extensive public expenditure cuts, Spain and Germany, with its problems resulting from the pursuit of a monetarist economic agenda, seek to conform to the terms of the treaty?

Will those countries let us off the hook? Will they let Britain stand back and interpret the convergence criteria flexibly? Of course not. They are suffering huge costs as a result of seeking to meet them and they will not allow us to escape from the stranglehold that Maastricht imposes. They will insist that we follow them down that same road. Otherwise, we cannot be part of the European monetary express train. It is in their interests to insist that we follow them; otherwise their populations will ask why they should suffer the consequences of the monetarist dogma when Britain stands free and interprets the criteria flexibly.

We know that the central driving force behind Maastricht is the competitive single market, where price, currency and interest rate stability predominate, together with tight restrictions on borrowing and debt, virtually regardless of the consequences for employment, growth and redistribution. Price stability is defined in article 3a as the overriding objective of the treaty's economic framework. It must be pursued "without prejudice" to any other objective, such as those that are stated in article 2.

It is not good enough to quote article 2 as the bible of the treaty when its provisions are overridden and swept aside by the much tighter, more specific constraints in article 3a. The policeman of this monetary regime, the independent European central bank, has its independence uncompromisingly spelt out in article 107. I shall not describe all the details of the banking regime because that would take me beyond the terms of the amendments.

[Mr. Hain]

However, when one considers the monetary constraints and the convergence criteria, the bank's role becomes crucial.

Article 107 says:

"When exercising the powers and carrying out the tasks and duties conferred on them by this Treaty and the Statute of the ECB, neither the ECB, nor a national central bank, nor any members of their decision-making bodies shall seek or take instructions from Community institutions or bodies, from any government of a Member State or from any other body. The Community institutions and bodies and governments of the Member States undertake to respect this principle and not to seek to influence the members of the decision-making bodies of the ECB or of the national central banks in the performance of their tasks."

Not much fudging or flexibility there.

11 pm

We see a microcosm of the central bank's operation in the way that the Bundesbank currently operates. It is driving the German economy into deep recession at huge cost to industry and at massive cost to social relations—with the rise of Nazism and all the other problems that we see in Germany now.

When an independent central bank pursues price stability in a dogmatic and fanatical fashion, the consequences are the rising unemployment and deflation we see throughout Europe, yet the treaty invites us to adopt exactly that agenda and framework.

A recent worldwide academic study showed that there is no relationship between the dogmatic pursuit of price stability and zero or low inflation and economic growth and success. Economic success is due to other, structural factors. Price stability is desirable, but it should not be fanatically pursued in the way that the treaty suggests and the Government worship at every opportunity.

While the treaty sets out strict criteria for monetary stability, it sets no comparable targets for growth, full employment or resource distribution. Its monetary targets are so strict that they are imposing deflation on member state economies, with devastating effects on the weak—at the very time that they need an expanison in demand and a strategy for full employment.

The savage public spending cuts being made across Europe are driving up unemployment beyond its present level of 18 million, or 10 per cent., towards the OECD forecast—if it is to be believed, and there is nothing to rival it—of 30 million jobless or 16 per cent. unemployment by the end of the decade.

Given the social strains that unemployment at its present level has already created—most frighteningly, in Germany—imagine what might happen if, under a monetarist regime, unemployment reached the level that the OECD suggests.

The monetarist regime is caught in a time warp. It was designed in an era when monetarism was fashionable and lauded in Britain under Thatcherism, but it has run out of steam. It was never valid and the treaty's objectives and framework are completely out of date. No one in Europe seriously suggests that the convergence criteria are not deflationary. Anyone who has studied the matter universally—including members of my own Front Bench—accepts that they are. The argument is whether they can be interpreted with sufficient flexibility, but I suggest that that is not possible under the terms of the treaty.

If one examines the way in which Europe is evolving under the treaty, one finds that bankers and money markets are ruling the roost rather than Governments and the people. According to Warburg, the merchant bankers, the drive by member states to convince the foreign exchange markets of their financial rectitude is forcing public spending cuts of 1·25 per cent. of GDP in 1993 alone—regardless of other convergence constraints and their impact on unemployment and public spending. That is being done simply to satisfy the foreign exchange markets. The exchange rate stability that the ERM and a more rigid Maastricht treaty would require is, according to merchant bankers, bringing massive deflation.

The Maastricht treaty attempts to establish an industrial policy in article 130, but all that—like the social chapter—pales into insignificance when compared with the monetarist regime that I have sought to describe. Those consequences are not felt only in rising unemployment and deflation; poverty in the European Community has increased. In 1975, 38 million people were affected; in 1992, the figure was 53 million, and the position will continue to worsen.

I believe that the treaty puts economics before politics, finance before democracy and the interests of bankers before those of citizens, and that that will result in Europe's imploding. I think that those who are genuinely pro-Europe will not support the treaty and, in particular, will oppose its monetarist economic framework. We believe in a Europe of full employment, a Europe of social justice; a Europe in which economies are encouraged to expand rather than contracting and deflating. Maastricht is blocking that opportunity at every level.

I believe that if the process continues—as it will if the Bill is passed and Europe adopts the proposed course—these "impossibilist" economic constraints will result in Europe's self-destruction. The vision of a united Europe, a democratic Europe—a socialist Europe, from my point of view—will be impossible to achieve: the high unemployment and public spending cuts that are being generated will cause such widespread political and social instability that the whole project will fall apart.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) dwelt on article 2 of the original treaty, as revised by the Maastricht treaty. The revised article sets out the objectives of the Community, which the House has discussed repeatedly during our debates on the Bill; it defines them, for instance, as

"sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States."

The hon. Gentleman spoke of those objectives with some enthusiasm. I agree with everything that he said about their importance; that is why they are written into the treaty. As he rightly said, one of the purposes of the Community—one of the purposes of the process that started with the original treaty—was to facilitate their delivery.

The hon. Gentleman went on to argue that new clause 1 would enhance the Government's accountability, particularly in the context of the achievement of the objectives defined in article 2 of the treaty of Rome. With some qualifications—I shall come to those in a moment—I am happy to accept the proposition that new clause 1 enhances accountability. I indicated earlier that the Government would not oppose the new clause.

It was at that point—some hours ago—that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) allowed himself the observation that, as hon. Members from all parties appeared to agree on the subjects that they were debating, this might be an opportunity for us to stop talking and move on to some of the other issues that might need to be explored. It was when the hon. Gentleman sat down that the disagreements started to surface: that was the point at which the hon. Member for Oxford, East began to talk about what he saw as the danger of a deflationary basis built into the Maastricht agreement.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East believed that the wider objectives set out in article 2 were in some sense jeopardised by the commitment set out in the treaty to deliver price stability and the monetary objectives that reinforce that central purpose. He described the old shibboleth that there is a choice to be made by policy makers—a long-term trade-off—between growth and inflation. That theme was picked up by several speakers, but the House will not be surprised to learn that the Government do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. It was developed—rather improbably—by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). He wanted to distance himself from a definition of economic policy which saw the control of inflation—I think I quote his words accurately—as

"the basic sole end of economic policy."

Of course nobody believes that the control of inflation is the basic sole end of economic policy. The purpose of delivering price stability is precisely in order to facilitate the delivery of the objectives set out in article 2 of the treaty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East did not feel that he could endorse what he described as the German policy of low inflation. It is common knowledge that the Germans have encountered short-term difficulties with their counter-inflationary discipline, but if we want to see the effect on the real economy and competitiveness of a superior performance in terms of monetary discipline, we need look no further than German manufacturing strength and the fact that the German economy has outperformed over a long period the rest of western Europe.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East described as an obsession with inflation is not confined to Germany. Recognition of the importance of a counter-inflationary discipline as the sine qua non of the delivery of successful economic policy is increasing throughout Europe, particularly in northern Europe. I do not regard it as an obsession with inflation. I regard it as a clear commitment to deliver the building block, the foundation upon which a successful economic policy is built.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East talked about the importance of expanding employment and of wider social objectives. Of course, I agree that expanding employment and raising living standards is the purpose of economic policy, but that remains so much hot air if we do not provide the foundation upon which experience demonstrates that a successful economic policy is built—namely, a sound monetary system.

The Government want successful monetary discipline and flexible labour markets that allow growth, generated on the basis of monetary discipline, to be converted into jobs. That is the mixture we commend in the Bill: a commitment to sound monetary discipline, which is the commitment that the Government give, and the avoidance of new obligations that would impair the workings of the labour market and thereby impair job creation. I look forward to the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East in resisting the proposals in the social chapter, added to the treaty, which would have the effect of impeding the expansion of employment which my hon. Friend espouses and which would also have the effect of destroying jobs in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Winnick: Leaving aside the social chapter, which we are not debating, does the Minister realise that with 17 million unemployed at present in the member states of the Community, what is required is economic expansion? Why does he believe that the much-quoted article 104c, under which member states are told that their budget deficit must not exceed the permitted limit of 3 per cent., which is spelt out in another article, will help to reduce unemployment? Will not he thereby ensure that, instead of 17 million people being unemployed, far more than 17 million will be unemployed?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman misreports article 104c. It does not say that under no circumstances may a member state's budget deficit rise above 3 per cent. of GDP. It says that at stage 3, to which this country is not committed to proceeding, member states will commit themselves to avoiding excessive Government deficits—or budget deficits, in our parlance. The purpose of avoiding excessive budget deficits and maintaining monetary discipline is for exactly the reasons that I described earlier—to facilitate wealth creation and, along with wealth creation, job creation.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) spoke to amendment No. 3.

Sir Teddy Taylor: In case there is any misunderstanding, what did my hon. Friend mean when he mentioned the social chapter? As far as I am aware, we are discussing only amendment No. 2, which the Foreign Secretary said will not apply the social chapter to Britain. Has there been some misunderstanding?

11.15 pm

Mr. Dorrell: In discussing not amendment No. 2 but new clause 1, I was simply responding to my hon. Friend's point about wanting an economic policy that leads to the expansion of employment. That is also what the Government want, which is why we are commending the combination of monetary discipline and the absence of social chapter regulations as the way to maximise growth and job creation in Britain.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli spoke to amendment No. 3, which he and some of his right hon. and hon. Friends tabled. At least some parts of amendment No. 3 define a kind of Euro-elysium, which the right hon. Gentleman espoused and which he wanted to see achieved. I should also like to see a world in which inflation over three years averaged less than 1·5 per cent. and in which growth proceeded briskly. That is a shared objective, but I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman's scepticism, which he again expressed this evening, about whether it is possible to achieve non-inflationary growth. During our previous debate on this subject, he asked me whether I could cite an example of non-inflationary growth. While he was speaking, I was looking up two examples which I think will be of interest to him and, possibly, also to the House.

[Mr. Dorrell]

In 1986-88, which is not ancient history, the average rate of inflation in Germany and Japan was less than 0·5 per cent. Statistically, that may not be zero, but it is certainly well within what amendment No. 3 recognises as being near price stability. During that three-year period when inflation averaged less than 0·5 per cent. in both countries, growth in Japan averaged 4·4 per cent. a year and in Germany 2·5 per cent. a year. Unemployment in Japan during that period averaged 2·7 per cent. and in Germany 6·2 per cent. That is a pretty attractive model for the type of economic development that I should like to see pursued in this country and, indeed, elsewhere in the Community.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is significant that he has been able to cite only one country——

Mr. Dorrell: Two countries.

Mr. Davies: ——one country in western Europe, and then only for a period of two years?

Mr. Dorrell: I picked out two, but I suspect that I could cite not dissimilar figures in the European Community, for example, in Holland. I did not want to detain the House by giving a long list. I should have thought that the example of the recent economic performances of Germany and Japan would be sufficiently persuasive to puncture the right hon. Gentleman's proposition that non-inflationary growth cannot be delivered in a modern free economy.

I always enjoy listening to the speeches of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) because they reassure me that the message of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) will be carried on by another means when he has passed to another place. The hon. Member for Neath asked why, in a treaty devoted primarily to economic and especially monetary union, there were no such explicit targets for wider social objectives as there are for monetary objectives. The reason is straightforward.

The economic heart of the treaty deals with questions of monetary policy. Unemployment rates, growth rates and wider economic policy issues remain matters of national concern. During the Bill's Committee stage we discussed the fact that the purpose of the provisions for economic and monetary union is to provide an institutional framework for the operation of monetary policy on a Community basis separate from the continuing national responsibility in the rest of the economic policy sphere.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Rubbish.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady may say that that is rubbish, but I cannot see how, on any linguistic basis, the treaty could be said to be devoted to any other purpose.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does not it occur to the Minister that those who control the economy have a direct effect on rates of unemployment and of inflation? Has that unique idea occurred only to the Opposition?

Mr. Dorrell: The point that I was making, with which the hon. Lady did not seem to agree, was that within the treaty a distinction is drawn between the operation of monetary policy and that of other aspects of economic policy.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is impossible.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that it is impossible, but there are numerous examples from around the world of political systems that draw precisely that distinction.

Mr. Shore: Surely the Minister is aware that article 103 says that economic policy shall be
"a matter of common concern",
and that there will be "multilateral surveillance" of how economic trends develop in all the countries. How can he possibly say that economic policy is not subject to Community rules under the treaty?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, because he has provided me with a basis upon which to proceed to the consideration of article 103, which is the main purpose of the new clause. The multilateral surveillance under that article is intended simply to provide a treaty framework for the discussions of economic policy that have taken place since at least 1974, in order to co-ordinate the full scope of economic policy within the Community. None the less, economic policy clearly remains the responsibility of national Governments within a widely drafted treaty commitment to co-ordination.

The point that I sought to make earlier was about a concept fundamentally different from the evolution of institutions responsible for day-to-day management on a Community basis of monetary policy, which is the purpose of the central banking arrangements set out in the treaty.

Mr. Shore: How, then, does the Minister explain the reference in article 103 to qualified majority voting?

Mr. Dorrell: The purpose of multilateral surveillance is clearly to allow the wider convergence of economic policy. That is not part of the clear path towards stage 3 and the operation of a single monetary policy provided for within the context of the bank.

Having sought to respond to the wider issues raised in the debate, I shall detain the House briefly by dealing with the terms of the new clause, which, as I have already said, the Government will not oppose. We have accepted that the House has an interest in the issues on which the new clause says that the Government should report. That interest is not in dispute. Article 103 makes it clear that we are talking about information on important measures which almost by definition is already reported to Parliament. Perhaps more important is the fact that it is reported to Parliament at the time that such decisions are made, so that Parliament can exercise its proper role of accountability and of scrutiny of the Government of the day. The new clause adds a further commitment to set reports submitted to the Commission by the Government in the context of the Government's assessment of progress towards the delivery of the objectives set out in article 2. If hon. Members wish to press that upon us, we shall not oppose them.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I have spoken before about the loss of economic sovereignty and political accountability that is written into the treaty. Tonight, I concentrate on the theme with which the Minister finished his comments—the terms of convergence. I especially wish to support amendment No. 3.

Just before the bank holiday, a delegation of visitors came here from Germany. As I listened to what the

Minister has just said, I realised that it was similar to what those visitors said to us. They said, "We know that, throughout Germany, the public believe that the treaty is unworkable and unwanted. But we have some good news for you. It is that we will not blow the gaff, break ranks or tell the public that we know it is unworkable and unwanted. In return, we expect you to do the same." The Minister said much the same. In effect, he said, "We know that the treaty is unworkable and unwanted outside, but we will not blow the gaff."

I had the temerity to ask why we should not all blow the gaff. The response was, "For goodness' sake, no. You cannot do that. If you did, we would all look fools." The sad news is that outside the House we have been rumbled. In Germany, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the public know that the treaty is unwanted and unworkable. They know that the terms of convergence offer them nothing in addressing the key issues that affect their daily lives. They know that the terms will not produce jobs, build houses and schools, invest in our infrastructure, halt crime or do anything to stop the fearful rise in nationalism, racism and fascism.

That is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and I have attempted to draft an amendment that would address, in a positive way, the real concerns of people in this country and throughout Europe. Amendment No. 3 is not a narrow nationalistic proposal. It is a commitment to a different vision of a people's Europe, a form of internationalism that is beggared by the treaty as a whole.

If I am asked why the treaty will be a catastrophe, I would refer the House to the table on page 14 of research paper 93/25 which sets out by how much all countries of the European Community currently fail to meet the terms of convergence. It reveals one case after another of failure, worse than the worst of the school reports I ever received, and I confess that some of them left something to be desired. The table shows that only France and Luxembourg would be in a position to proceed on the basis of convergence that the treaty requires. Even they are beginning to turn a fearful eye on the levels of unemployment and the social upheaval in their countries.

We are being asked to subscribe to what is little more than a feast of fools. Monetary convergence would not work without mass unemployment, permanent social division and reliance on a dreadful degree of racism and xenophobia. Some of the worst effects of that can be seen in Germany, France and Italy. They are also present in my county of Nottinghamshire, where last week the *Nottingham Evening Post* ran an extensive series of articles detailing its concern about the new activities of neo-fascist groups in the county. Their appeal is based on the fear of unemployment and poverty and on the alienation of young people.

Amendment No. 3 sets out in a modest way to offer beacons of hope around which reinvestment in people can be structured. It talks of a required rate of growth of 3 per cent., not a large figure. To achieve it, we would have to echo Japan's initiative, by which it has increased government borrowing by £75 billion to increase its rate of growth from 1·25 to 3·3 per cent., or we would have to follow the German example of borrowing for reinvestment, by transferring £30 billion a year for the next decade, in pursuit not of zero inflation but of social stability. That is missing from the Maastricht treaty and its criteria for convergence. We would inherit a fearful legacy if we signed up to it.

We require a policy of investment in people that will not discriminate on the basis of age, and will not set men against women, young against old, French or Greeks against British. It requires a common investment policy that will not rob Peter in Paris to pay Paul in Peterborough. We are offering a set of proposals which would be modest, but which would commit us to removing regional disparities, to challenging poverty in the European Community and requiring the United Kingdom to have a regional policy which means something because it sets targets for reducing unemployment and regional inequalities in wealth.

11.30 pm

Were we to be given the right to vote on amendment No. 3, it would give the House the chance to rise as one behind a set of policies that would invest in the people of this country and the people of Europe. It would not be a bankers' charter or a bureaucrats' charter. It would start from the fears and concerns that assail every one of our constituents, if only we had the courage to listen to them. If we voted on the amendment, it would give the Labour Front-Bench team the chance to rise up and lay claim to it as the core of a socialist policy to which I know we could all subscribe.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendments made to the proposed clause: in line 1, leave out from 'of' to 'Her' in line 3 and insert 'the Treaty establishing the European Community'.

In line 6, leave out 'Title II'.

In line 7, leave out 'Article' and insert 'Articles'.

In line 8, leave out 'out of the Treaty'.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Clause, as amended, added to the Bill.

New clause 2

ASSENT BY NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT

'. Where within the Treaty on European Union referred to in section 1 above there is a requirement for changes in voting procedure in its Council of Ministers, or other changes therein specified that decision be made after assent by the member states and in acccordance with their respective constitutional requirements, in the United Kingdom that assent shall be by Act of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Shore.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Shore: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to discuss the following: New clause 4—*Procedure for determining the common foreign and security policy*—

' . When it is proposed that the Council of Ministers responsible for determining a common Foreign and Security Policy are to define matters for joint action in accordance with Article J.3.2 of the Treaty named in section 1 above, no Minister of the Crown shall assent to such a proposal before those matters proposed to be specified are given approval in a Resolution passed by both Houses of Parliament. ' .

New clause 19—*Adoption of conventions in the fields of justice and home affairs*—

'No convention drawn up by the Council of the European Communities under Article K.3.2.(c) of the Treaty on European Union shall be adopted by the United Kingdom unless the decision to adopt the convention has been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons. ' .

[Madam Speaker]

New clause 38—*Adoption of conventions in the field of justice and of home affairs—*

'No convention drawn up by the Council of the European Communities under Articles K.3.2.(c) of the Treaty of European Union shall be adopted by the United Kingdom unless a draft of the proposed instrument of adoption has first been approved by Act of Parliament. '.

Mr. Shore: The Government are obviously in an accommodating mood, but I have not yet heard them say that they are prepared to accept new clause 2. No doubt a message will come to me encouraging me in my remarks. If the Government have a few manuscript amendments to make, I shall willingly accept them and we can then proceed.

We are all aware that there is much poison in the treaty. I would divide it into two sorts of poison. The first is the sort that we have just been discussing—the harsh, deflationary bias of the treaty and the appalling effect that it will have on a Europe which is already in deep recession. We have had discussions about what that means in terms of a European central bank, control of alleged excess deficits and the convergence criteria. I am talking not about that sort of poison, but about another sort—the transfer of powers and decision making from the people and Parliament, both of this country and of other countries in Europe, to European institutions.

Many transfers of power will take place under the Maastricht treaty. I refer not only to the extension of Community competence. Article 3, with its subclauses from (a) to (t), and the subsequent spelling out of what they mean, shows the vast number of our affairs that are to be handed over to the European Community. Those many new competencies include the introduction of a qualified majority vote which will take away any effective control that the House may exercise over its Ministers.

What does new clause 2 seek to achieve? It cannot deal with that which is already handed over in the Maastricht treaty, but it can at least put a brake upon the further transfers of power and competence which are envisaged in different parts of the treaty. We are seeking to make sure that the authority of an Act of Parliament would be needed before Ministers could accept further proposals to take powers and exercise them on a Community basis.

The House will agree that an Act of Parliament is necessary when I have given one or two illustrations. Before I do that, I want to say a word or two about new clause 4 in which we do not seek the authority of an Act of Parliament and are prepared to accept a resolution of both Houses of Parliament. I refer to the provisions under foreign and security policy, where joint actions are envisaged.

As the House will remember, under the foreign and security policy which is far-reaching in its commitment and is the compass of the whole enterprise, there is provision for a common position and joint actions. Those joint actions could be of great importance. They could cover, for example, non-military sanctions and the recognition or non-recognition of states. When a common action is agreed, majority voting takes place within that range of matters dealt with by a joint action.

The new clause provides that when a joint action is proposed, before a Minister can assent to such a proposal he should first get the authority of both Houses of Parliment and a motion should come before both Houses for that purpose. That is my one illustration of an area where a resolution would be right. We have proposed a resolution rather than an Act of Parliament because we are all aware that in foreign policy matters events move fast and there is not always the luxury of dealing with matters within the time scale of an Act of Parliament.

Let me turn back to where we want the authority of an Act of Parliament. Many parts of the treaty are important. I refer first to the proposals dealing with citizenship. As the House may recall, under article 8e, the discussion of the rights of citizenship ends as follows:

"On this basis . . . the Council . . . on a proposal of the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may adopt provisions to strengthen or to add to the rights laid down in this Part, which it shall recommend to the Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

As those who have read new clause 2 will see, we wish to see the words, "respective constitutional requirements" interpreted as an Act of Parliament and by no other means.

Citizenship is clearly extremely important. The rights of citizenship under article 8 are a modest beginning, but here is envisaged the extension of the rights of citizenship. We consider that proposals for extending those rights should be brought before the House and proper legislative authority be given for them if they meet with our approval.

I shall give just two illustrations of what might be thought to be a problem arising out of the extension of the rights of citizenship. One is the totally unrestricted right of movement and residence which is already allowed for in article 8a but which could be extended by the removal of those remaining constraints under article 8a, which states that it should be

"subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in this Treaty and by the measures adopted to give it effect."

People can otherwise move and reside freely throughout the Community.

The provisions go too far in any event and I have the strong feeling that there will be an attempt to expand them still further. As we know, voting rights are given to Community citizens wherever they may be so that they can take part in a local election and in a European Parliament election. That is already conceded under article 8c. I am willing to bet that the next step will be the right to take part in national elections. No such right should be extended without the proper consideration of the House, which should include full debate and full legislative proposals.

I have mentioned only rights so far. Article 8.2 provides:

"Citizens of the Union shall enjoy the rights conferred by this Treaty and shall be subject to the duties imposed thereby."

The duties may be far less acceptable than the rights. We should keep a close watch on the duties and obligations that may be imposed on us.

Mr. Rowlands: What are they?

Mr. Shore: We have not yet had them defined. They are kept under wraps. A great deal of restraint is going on in the Community so that those who have not yet ratified the treaty are not frightened. There has been an almost Trappist vow of silence in the European Commission, which has been unusually quiet during these tense months of negotiation and debate.

Mr. Rowlands: My right hon. Friend kindly responded to my sedentary request about what the duties were. He

said that we do not know yet. Will he tell us whether it is possible for the citizens of the union to renounce citizenship without renouncing national citizenship?

Mr. Shore: There appears to be no provision for any citizen to renounce European citizenship. It is imposed on people. The analogy that comes to my mind is the famous story of a Chinese general who baptised his army as Christians with a hosepipe. We are all being hosepiped with European citizenship and I do not find that at all attractive. It is important that we should retain the right to reject that imposed citizenship if we do not want it.

Mr. Spearing: My right hon. Friend tabled amendment No. 49, which was not selected, which might have given that democratic right. Does he agree that the word "rights" is ambiguous? Should not the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who has happily joined us, elucidate the word now or later? If the right of a citizen was extended, the adjudication of that right would take place centrally. Therefore, the power of the central authority, of the court or wherever would be extended, perhaps by an Act of Parliament. That also applies to the right of the Community over its citizens. Should not we, therefore, get some explanation from the Minister of State, unless he is happily able, as in previous debates, to say that he accepts the new clause?

Mr. Shore: If the Minister wishes to intervene, I shall give way. Evidently he does not.

The question of duties and rights is, again, an area that we have not properly explored, although we have had a number of days of debate. We have done our best to explore the many important issues that are crammed together in this now five-clause Bill, which refers to more than 200 pages of treaty text.

The same problem arises about the procedures for electing the European Parliament. Again, we find in article 108.3 the following:

"The European Parliament shall draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States.

The Council shall, acting unanimously . . . which shall act by a majority of its component members, lay down the appropriate provisions, which it shall recommend to Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

I believe that our constitutional requirement should, once again, be an Act of Parliament. I do not believe that we should agree to changing, as may well be the case, our electoral system for election of Members of the European Parliament to a European generalised system if it is not a system of which we approve. What we must face straight away is the whole complicated argument about whether we should have a form of proportional representation, because that is the system that the European Community will undoubtedly adopt. Any such change, therefore, should be the subject of serious debate in the House before any consent was given.

11.45 pm

That is a second example which I think is important. There is another one which is probably the most important of all, and it is in the area of home affairs and justice. A number of articles are called in question here. Article 100c, hon. Members on both sides will recall, deals on the face of it with the rather narrow matter of possession of visas and refers to the fact that from 1 January 1996 decisions about whether to have visas in relation to other, third countries shall be made by a qualified majority vote on a proposal by the Commission. But more important than that and a little bit further down under the same article, paragraph 6 of 100c says:

"This Article shall apply to other areas if so decided pursuant to Article K.9 of the provisions of the Treaty on European Union which relate to co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs, subject to the voting conditions determined at the same time."

So, inevitably and rightly, we turn to article K.9. What do we find there? After "The Council, acting unanimously", and so on, on the initiative of the Commission, we find: "may decide to apply Article 100c of the Treaty establishing the European Community to action in areas referred to in Article K.1(1) to (6), and at the same time determine the relevant voting conditions relating to it. It shall recommend the Member States to adopt that decision in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

Article K.1(1) to (6) deals with matters of enormous importance to the House. Section (1) deals with asylum policy. Section (2) deals with

"rules governing the crossing by persons of the external borders of the Member States and the exercise of controls thereon".

We shall be faced with this still quite unresolved question of whether 200 or 300 Europeans, providing they wave a piece of purple cardboard, can come through a British port or airport without any further check. That has yet to be resolved, because the Commission takes one view and the Home Secretary, we hope, takes another, and the matter will presumably in the end be dealt with by the European Court of Justice. Anyway, here it is allowed specifically to come within a common policy in future and to be decided by qualified majority vote, because that is the essence of article 100c.

Section (3) of article K.1 concerns immigration policy and policy regarding nationals of third countries:

"(a) conditions of entry and movement by nationals of third countries on the territory of Member States;

(b) conditions of residence by nationals of third countries on the territory of Member States, including family reunion and access to employment;

(c) combatting unauthorised immigration, residence and work by nationals of third countries on the territory of Member States".

This is a huge and complex area and we have made many efforts in the past 30 or more years to devise immigration policies which, we hope, try to be fair and sensitive and to avoid racial discrimination in their application. I cannot say that we have always been successful, but that at least has been our purpose. I believe that any changes of this kind require an Act of Parliament and the most serious consideration by the House.

Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of Article K.1 refer to

"combatting drug addiction in so far as this is not covered by 7 to 9; combatting fraud on an international scale in so far as this is not covered by 7 to 9; judicial co-operation in civil matters".

These do not have quite the same dramatic impact as asylum, the removal of internal frontiers, and immigration policy, but any attempt to bring them under a common policy and to use majority voting procedures under this article should not be allowed without an Act of Parliament. We must insist on that, and that is what the new clause seeks to bring about.

Mr. George Robertson: The items that my right hon. Friend is discussing are certainly serious and important, and if any changes along these lines were made, Parliament would assume that they would be treated in a serious way. In building his case for the Bill to include a statutory

[Mr. George Robertson]

requirement for an Act of Parliament on every occasion, however, can my right hon. Friend point to any examples of measures of similar importance being dealt with in the House in ways less serious than what he proposes?

Mr. Shore: Many important changes have been effected, but I would have to search my memory for any such examples during the 21 years since we signed the treaty of accession. Irrespective of whether there have been examples of developments of Community competence that have not been incorporated in Acts of Parliament, however, I maintain that the instances that I have cited, of occasions when we are invited to approve measures according to our own constitutional requirements, are important enough to require Acts of Parliament.

My hon. Friend may tell me not to worry, but there is no guarantee that such changes would appear in Acts of Parliament. They might be put into effect by means of a resolution, or we might just be told that they had happened and then receive a report from the Minister. I am trying to maintain an element of parliamentary control and accountability over and for what could be major extensions of the treaty or what could be other major decisions.

Mr. Hoon: Perhaps I may put in a different way the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). Although I agree about the serious nature of my right hon. Friend's illustrations, the difficulty is that none of his examples has led to Acts of Parliament. They have been dealt with in different ways under the United Kingdom's constitutional arrangements. Perhaps they will be dealt with differently under those arrangements in future, but I cannot see that the Maastricht treaty makes any difference to the situation. We may have our criticisms of our constitution, but it is not necessarily changed, in this context, by the treaty.

Mr. Shore: Those constitutional arrangements consist of Ministers signing accords or of Ministers doing whatever they want and then reporting back to Parliament. Alternatively, they may interpose, before making a decision, a parliamentary procedure. And there are only two parliamentary procedures: one is a motion of both Houses; the other is an Act of Parliament. I have already said that a motion or resolution would be right, for reasons of time and speed, in the area of common action under foreign policy. I am citing the other areas where I believe strongly that there should be an Act of Parliament. If my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton wants to argue against that, let him do so when the time comes.

Mr. Spearing: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only purpose of the interventions of our hon. Friends was to question the need for an Act of Parliament? *[Interruption.]* They shake their heads; I am relieved at that. If there is anything less than an Act of Parliament, surely there is a risk that the Executive will be stronger, perhaps by a single vote. In respect of the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), does my right hon. Friend recall that, when the original legislation was passed in 1972, there was no provision for an Act of Parliament to sanction any increase in the power of the European Parliament? That was imposed only at a time of direct elections. Clause 1(2) of the Bill refers to the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978, and the powers of the European Parliament in the treaty can be agreed only by virtue of that part of the clause. Does not that make the case for my hon. Friend's amendment rather than the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton?

Mr. Shore: I hope that I am carrying my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton. I expect the support of the whole Labour party for new clause 2. I cannot see any reason why he should fail to give full support to that new clause. I hope that there will be support from hon. Members in other parts of the House who are concerned that we should retain proper control over further actions which would reduce the competence, the authority and the power of this Parliament.

Mr. George Robertson: I have listened with care to my right hon. Friend. As he knows only too well, I cannot make definitive judgments on the spur of the moment about what the Opposition Front Bench can support. My right hon. Friend keeps hoping that I will be changed as the spokesman; that is one of his many hopes. Lest he took the wrong message from my first intervention, which was a genuine request for information, he should not draw anything more than that from it. Again I ask a question. My right hon. Friend has thought about it a lot and he is building his argument.

Based on what my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) has just said, there is a variety of constitutional ways in which the House of Commons, the House of Lords, or Parliament, might decide to deal with these matters, and which would conform to national constitutional arrangements. Might not an order in this House be a preferable instrument to an Act of Parliament that would involve the other place in the process? We might not feel that it was appropriate for the other place always to be involved in a cumbersome procedure to deal with all the matters that my right hon. Friend has laid out.

Mr. Shore: Orders or motions of approval are alternatives to Acts of Parliament. I remind my hon. Friend once more of the issues that I illustrated: one, extensions of the rights and possibly the duties of citizenship; two, the procedures for election to the European Parliament; three, the very important areas of asylum, immigration and related matters which come under justice and home affairs. I cannot believe that he could find any reason why we should not have a full parliamentary procedure and not simply a debate, whether it is carried out in this House alone or in both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Bill Walker: I have been listening carefully because the right hon. Gentleman is getting into important areas that should properly be examined. Has he considered the rights and duties of the monarch of the United Kingdom? He will be aware that the monarch in Scotland is the Queen of Scots, not the Queen of Scotland. There is a substantial difference. The 1706 Act and the treaty of Union clearly spell out the position of the monarch and the monarch's heirs. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in hon. Members shaking their heads or laughing. That area could unravel this whole business. Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the position of the monarch?

Mr. Shore: I confess that I have given that little consideration. My general objection to compulsory

citizenship of the European union would become even more pointed if such citizenship were applied to the monarch who is also Head of the Commonwealth. Such compulsion would be absurd, and I am sure that that sentiment is widely shared.

My last illustration is important and relates to our constitutional procedures, the admission of new members to the European Community and the conditions under which they are allowed to join. Those issues should be subjected to serious debate and investigation before we allow a decision to be made on our behalf by the Community as a whole.

I have not attempted to identify in the treaty every conceivable instance of a constitutional procedure being allowed, but I think that I have identified most of them and I have certainly picked out the most important ones. I hope that we shall vote on the new clause and that I shall have the support not only of my Front-Bench colleagues but of hon. Members in all parts of the House. I shall be pleased if the Minister of State is as forthcoming in dealing with the new clause as he has been in dealing with all the other amendments that have been moved.

12 midnight

Mr. Garel-Jones: I regret that I shall have to disappoint the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) who, unusually for him, has moved a wrecking amendment. We are debating a House of Commons matter and I do not disguise the fact that the new clause is a wrecking amendment.

Mr. Shore: The right hon. Gentlemen well knows, because he has been rebuked about it, that he cannot describe an amendment that has been allowed by the Chair as a wrecking amendment.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I accept that. By definition, any amendment selected by the Chair is not a wrecking amendment because it is in order. In case you thought that I was being disrespectful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should say that in my terms a wrecking amendment is one that would render the Government incapable of ratifying. The new clause and the other clauses and amendments that are grouped with it call for some sort of specific domestic procedure by which the House should register its approval of various activities carried out under the Maastricht treaty. I hope to demonstrate that not only in the specific matters to which the right hon. Gentleman referred is the new clause unnecessary, but that for reasons related to the traditional way in which the House organises its business it would be extremely unwise to include in an Act of Parliament the kind of procedural devices that the right hon. Gentleman seeks.

New clause 2 provides that where decisions taken by the Council, acting unanimously, are to be adopted by member states, in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements, an Act of Parliament shall be the constitutional requirement in the United Kingdom. It has been the practice that substantive changes brought about by the decision of the Council—for example, in relation to articles 138 on European Parliament electoral procedure, 201 on own resources, 236 on treaty amendment and 237 on the admission of new members —are covered by an Act of Parliament.

I can give the House some examples of that. There were accession Acts for Greece, Spain and Portugal. The European Communities (Finance) Act 1988 gave effect to the own resources decision. The House judged that, in order to meet our constitutional requirements, such measures required an Act of Parliament. Similarly, an Act is likely to be the most appropriate method to give domestic legal effect in United Kingdom law to any substantive changes brought about under article 18. The right hon. Gentleman referred to additions to the citizenship rights. Article K.9 deals with transfers into United Kingdom competence.

I remember having an exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who is not in his place but is in the House. I hope that those who have taken what one might generically call a sceptical view about the Government's wish to ratify the Maastricht treaty might be able, when new clauses and amendments such as this are moved, to step back from their opposition and to consider it as a House of Commons matter. I do not think that the House would wish, on reflection, to pre-empt the possibility of using a parliamentary procedure other than an Act of Parliament, as would be the case if the new clause were accepted. It may be that there could be a less significant substantial change for which the House might feel that an order under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act 1972 would be entirely appropriate.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Minister saying that it is not within the option—I use that word carefully—of the House to determine the way in which the House, rather than the Government, determines its own United Kingdom constitutional arrangements for implementing those changes in the treaty? If he does not accept the new clause, he is saying that it is in the hands of the majority of the Administration of the day to choose whether it is done with an order under section 1(3), an hour and a half after 10 o'clock if one is lucky, or some other procedure. Why cannot it be, in principle, in the Bill?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am not saying that. I shall be dealing with those specific points later. The hon. Gentleman is rightly held in high regard in the House for the interest and the assiduity with which he attends not just European Community business but all business. I am astonished that his commitment to wrecking the Maastricht treaty is so strong that he is prepared, in a House of Commons matter, to write into an EC Act of Parliament the procedures of the House, to subject the House to the scrutiny of another place on matters that are our own procedures. He is well aware that the way that the House of Commons operates in procedure—I know that the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) will confirm this—is not on the basis of the Executive, whatever kind of majority it has, being able, in matters of procedure such as this, to ride roughshod over the wishes of the official Opposition or of the House as a whole. The hon. Gentleman knows that to be the case.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I want to make a little more progress. I shall return more specifically to that point and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene again I shall give way to him.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney also touched on new clause 4. It requires the Government to obtain approval in a resolution passed by both Houses

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

of Parliament before a Minister agrees to joint action. My contention—I hope that the House will accept this—is that there is no need for this new clause. I shall explain why.

The common foreign and security policy, including joint action, builds, as the House is well aware, on the close co-operation already established under European political co-operation through the Single European Act. Many actions taken under European political co-operation would fit the joint action criteria. It is certainly the Government's position that the best interests of the United Kingdom lie in co-operating with our partners on foreign policy issues to achieve a co-ordinated approach.

As in other areas of foreign policy, considerations of confidentiality and speed are vital to the effectiveness of policy. It would not be appropriate or effective to require the Government to seek parliamentary approval for each decision. In the past 10 days we have had the example of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The House was concerned and representations were made by the official Opposition and by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Of course, in such circumstances the Foreign Secretary needs to come to the House and to appear before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee to give account of himself and the Government's actions in that matter to the House.

I assure the House that all major decisions under the common foreign and security policy will be taken by unanimity, including any decision on whether to use qualified majority voting on some procedural decisions on joint action. The Government would certainly not agree to any policy that they regarded as inimical to the United Kingdom's national interests. If hon. Members step back from the controversies that surround the treaty, they will accept that this Administration have not been criticised for not being willing to make statements to the House and appearances before the appropriate Select Committee.

Mr. Shore: I am not entirely convinced, because the nearest thing that we have had to a joint action, a common foreign policy, in Europe in recent years is the recognition of the various republics that once formed Yugoslavia. I strongly believe that the House would have benefited greatly from a debate before the Foreign Secretary agreed to that decision.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not agree. There have been a range of decisions under European political co-operation which would fit into the joint action criteria.

New clause 19, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), and new clause 38, in the name of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, refer to parliamentary approval for conventions drawn up under the justice and home affairs pillar. Paragraph 2(c) of article K.3, to which the new clauses refer, already requires such conventions to be recommended for adoption by the member states in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. In other words, such conventions will acquire a kind of ratification by member states.

In the United Kingdom, the position will vary in accordance with well-established practice according to whether the convention requires any change in United Kingdom law before it can be given effect. If it did, Parliament's approval of the legislation would be required before ratification. If it did not, the Ponsonby rule would apply and there would be the usual opportunities for debate. There is no need to treat international conventions drawn up under paragraph 2(c) of article K.3 any differently from those concluded elsewhere—such as in the United Nations.

I understand the wish of the right hon. Gentleman and of other right hon. and hon. Members to examine proposals, and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the House will be kept fully informed, as it is under our existing scrutiny procedures. As I explained in Committee, it is essentially a matter of how the House arranges its own procedures for scrutinising Community business. It is a question of domestic housekeeping for the House and wholly inappropriate for enshrinement in an Act of Parliament, as the amendments seek.

12.15 am

Mr. Rowlands: The Minister's whole case is that these procedures are a continuation of European co-operation. Will he confirm that there was no suggestion that European co-operation of the kind that we have known would be subject to any form of qualified majority? Will he further confirm that a contentious decision—such as the recognition of a future Croatia—would only be reached by unanimity and would never be subject to a qualified majority process?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I made it clear that the decisions to move to qualified majority voting can be taken only by unanimity—and even then will only be for a limited period. It goes without saying that no United Kingdom Government of any political colour would agree to matters that we would regard as being of great consequences or which had a significant effect on our national interest being decided by qualified majority voting. I can give that commitment on behalf of not just this Administration but, I believe, any future Administrations.

I have tried to show that any changes under articles 138, 236, 237, and so on, would in any event be covered by an Act of Parliament. In Committee, I touched on the general point that it has not been the practice of the House to embody parliamentary procedures in legislation.

Mr. Spearing: This is not a procedure.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Perhaps I may continue. Procedures laid down in statute are, by definition, inflexible. If these procedures were found to be deficient in any way or in need of fine tuning, we would require additional legislation to make the necessary changes, however minor they might be.

That has two implications, which I ask the House to consider carefully. Changing an Act of Parliament by statute is a relatively slow process. It would eat away at parliamentary time that could be devoted to other purposes. Also, altering an Act of Parliament requires the consent of the House of Lords. I mean no disrespect to the other place in pointing out that the effect would be to surrender in some sense control over the internal procedures of this House to the other place.

I will give the House a good example of that. The existing scrutiny procedures of this House have proven themselves flexible to meet challenges in the past, and I believe that they will meet our new requirements. As I reminded the Committee, the 1990 review of scrutiny arrangements gave rise to two particularly significant developments. The six-monthly debates on European

Community developments were made more forward looking than in the past, and the two European Standing Committees were established.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)—whom no right hon. or hon. Member would describe as a Euro-enthusiast but who is a member of European Standing Committee A—spoke well of the kind of scrutiny of EC directives that is undertaken in the European Standing Committees. She clearly thought—and I share her view—that the work done by those Committees was useful to the House.

The Procedure Committee's review in December 1991 of the first session of the new Standing Committees led to some minor changes. Hon. Members should note that, were these procedures enshrined in an Act of Parliament, even such minor changes would have required statutory backing. The new clause strikes me as a way of fettering the House's freedom of manoeuvre—as a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend suggests that he is concerned about tying the hands of the House. It seems more likely that he is concerned about tying the hands of the Whips and the Government's business managers. He said that we should not enshrine in legislation the way in which the House should deal with some future events arising from the European Community, but we are doing that in the Bill by saying that the single currency must be subject to an Act of Parliament.

The new clause seeks to add two other aspects. It does not apply to all Community legislation, but it seeks to add "changes in voting procedure" and circumstances in which a decision is made

"after assent by member states and in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements".

It is suggested that that assent should also be by Act of Parliament. There is no difference between such matters being decided by Act of Parliament, and the single currency being decided by Act of Parliament.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Let me correct my hon. Friend. I think that clause 3 specifies that if the conditions were ever to pertain for Britain to consider going into a single currency, the matter must be debated in the House first. The essential point that he misses, however, is that a range of weapons is available to the House of Commons, allowing it to scrutinise the way in which Community business is handled.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend was present for the beginning of my speech, but a substantial part of the business would in any event be handled by Act of Parliament. I gave a number of examples of decisions taken in Council in which what we in the House would regard as constitutional requirements in the United Kingdom would involve an Act of Parliament. Certainly, any decisions made under the provisions for inter-governmental co-operation in the justice and home affairs pillar that would change the law in the United Kingdom would require an Act of Parliament; but a number of other decisions may not require an Act of Parliament. The House may need to scrutinise those in a different way.

For all my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North and I know, in the coming years—as the House becomes more accustomed to dealing with Community business—it may wish to elaborate on the Standing Committees that have already been set up, which give it additional powers. One of the beauties of the House of Commons is its flexibility in this regard—its ability to scrutinise, and to call Ministers in for statements and debates.

I assure my hon. Friend that the Executive has substantial powers in the House; but, as someone who has spent quite some time working in the usual channels, I know that it is simply not possible to run the British Parliament if the Executive believes that it can trample over the Opposition's rights—and, indeed, the sentiment and the will of the House. That is part of the mix that goes into running the House.

Mr. Shore: The right hon. Gentleman says that it has not been the habit of this House to legislate on its own procedures and that the new clause would curtail the freedom of the House. When I hear remarks like that, I think that I am standing on my head. We are considering legislating on our own procedures precisely because it was never the habit of this Parliament, before the past 20 years, to hand over its powers to agencies outside its control and to submit itself to their superior authority and to treaty law. That is the essence of the difference. The purpose of my new clause is to impose stricter parliamentary control over any further transfer of powers. That, surely, the Minister understands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Of course I understand that, but, with the greatest respect, the real position of the right hon. Gentleman—it is a perfectly respectable one, and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) was prepared to resign from the Administration on account of it, which was not a light decision to take—is that he has never accepted the treaty of Rome. As he says, for 20 years or more, a parliamentary practice has built up. I maintain that the scrutiny requirements and procedures of the House will almost certainly need to be reviewed—in particular, the examination of activity under the two intergovernmental pillars—at an appropriate time, not just through the usual channels but by the Select Committee on Home Affairs. The House, in its own way, will grope its way towards what it considers to be the right and appropriate procedure for keeping a check on Ministers.

For the reasons I have given, I do not believe that the European Communities (Amendment) Bill is a suitable vehicle for changing the scrutiny arrangements of the House.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend corrected me. Can I try to correct my right hon. Friend? If I am incorrect, he can correct me again. My right hon. Friend said, with regard to the single currency, that it was not necessary to have an Act of Parliament. I think that he referred to clause 3 of the Bill. However, clause 2 says that

"No notification shall be given to the Council of the European Communities that the United Kingdom intends to move to the third stage . . . unless a draft of the notification has first been approved by Act of Parliament".

Mr. Garel-Jones: I stand corrected. My hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Spearing: To use the Minister's words, we are now about to grope, are we not? Does he not make the distinction, which we make, between report and scrutiny on the one hand and control on the other? We are talking about parliamentary control, not all the other issues that the Minister mentioned. Can he help me to determine

[Mr. Spearing]

whether I am mistaken, or whether he is ignorant, or whether he is trying to deceive the House? One of those three must, I think, be right.

About 10 minutes ago, the Minister said that it is not the practice of the House to lay down what procedures shall be found within an Act, but surely he agrees that Acts of Parliament abound with requirements for reports and with requirements for statutory instruments—whether it be an ordinary order, an order that is subject to the negative procedure or an order that requires resolution —to be made by Ministers to achieve a certain purpose. That happens thousands of times in Acts of Parliament. Why should we not say that we do not want a resolution, we want an Act of Parliament?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The answer to those three questions is that there is a fourth question. The hon. Gentleman deceives himself. It is a matter of judgment for the House. It is not a question of the different views that are held about the merits of the Maastricht treaty. I believe that the flexibility that the House has to change and alter its procedures will be needed by the House in the years to come as the functioning of the treaty on European union gets under way.

As I said in Committee, I am sure that the irony of the situation would not be lost on the House were any of the new clauses to be accepted because our procedure would then effectively be regulated by a piece of European legislation, which is not a happy prospect for those of us anxious to preserve the House's position.

12.30 am

Mr. Spearing: I shall take up the Minister's point straight away. He claims that he will resist the new clause because it is anti-Parliament and something which will bind our successors in a way that they would not wish to be bound. He is nodding his head, but I think that he, not my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), is standing on his head.

Is the Minister afraid of an Act of Parliament which will affect any future Administration, not just the current one? We are talking about the next X number of years, as long as the treaty lasts. I thank the Minister for his initial statement and I agree that the debate is about the scrutiny of procedures and about control. At the beginning of his speech, the Minister properly said that, if the new clause were accepted, it would not affect ratification of the treaty in any way. As he rightly says, we are discussing House of Commons procedure.

In a homely term, the Minister said that we should not write into an Act how Parliament should operate in what he called a "housekeeping" capacity. I suggest that it was a slightly misleading term because our procedures in relation to housekeeping come under the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), along with the way in which the buildings operate, the salaries and wages of staff and even our own returns. There is a great difference between the order of the House under the rules of procedure, which are neutral and which cross the whole range of activity, whether it be a question on foreign affairs or an Adjournment debate—the latter has brought down a Government before now—and what the Minister is now saying. The Minister is saying that he does not want any future Executive to be bound by the duty and need to bring an Act of Parliament. He says that it is a rigidity which will bind the House itself. Surely, the real binding is the binding of the Executive of the day.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman must not put words into my mouth. I began my remarks by giving a list of instances in which, on past practice, it is well accepted that an Act of Parliament would be the constitutionally appropriate way for the House to give its assent. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) waggled one of those instances—changes in the electoral process for the European Parliament—before the House as a skeleton. I am saying that the new clause seeks to cast the net in such a way as to make it not only cumbersome but inconvenient for the House.

None of us is naive and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that under many of our procedures the usual channels have to dragoon hon. Members in to keep the debates going. Let us not deceive ourselves about what we would be shackling the House with. In matters of scrutiny, I believe that the two new Standing Committees have been successful. The House has the ability to build on them and will do so. I do not want that process to be inhibited by an Act of Parliament.

Mr. Spearing: I do not think that I misunderstood what the right hon. Gentleman was saying. Just before I gave way, my charge was that the shackles were not on the House but on the Executive and Government of the day. With due respect, he has not answered that charge. Clearly, a requirement in the Bill for, say, a resolution or an affirmative order would mean a requirement on the Government.

As it happens, an Act of Parliament rather than a resolution is specified in the set of amendments. That shackle is stronger and bigger and it may be a more inconvenient and cumbersome instrument, but it is not in a different category; it is an obligation of the Administration of the day towards the House. Surely that is the essence of the matter.

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose*——

Mr. Spearing: I shall give way in a moment, but first may I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that that is not a cut-and-dried issue? I shall reply to what he said to me before I give way again. He may say that in the past there has been an Act of Parliament for this, that or the other, but may I remind him of a certain famous occasion on which Lady Thatcher of Kesteven said that there would be an intergovernmental agreement to raise the financial contribution. Does the Minister remember how the Government got round the 1 per cent. arrangement? The money was topped up through an intergovernmental agreement outside the treaty. As the Minister said, an attempt was made to do that under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act 1972.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) is in the Chamber, because I intend to talk about something that happened during his premiership, or just afterwards. Under section 1(3) of the 1972 Act a simple affirmative order in the House, which would have agreed the treaty, was tried. There was a challenge in the courts and a judicial review and a separate Act of Parliament—a Consolidated Fund Bill—had to be introduced instead of the order that the Government of the day tried to use.

I tell the Minister, therefore, that the practice is not a rigid one. One cannot always rely on custom and practice, unless the precedents are well built in. The example that I have given shows that the House had to go through the financial procedure of a Consolidated Fund Bill to agree to the payment out of the Consolidated Fund, because there was not an automatic Community obligation under the European Communities Act introduced by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Spearing: I shall give one more example before giving way again to the Minister.

Shortly after the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup ceased to be Prime Minister there was a debate when he was in opposition and my right hon. and hon. Friends and I were in government. A statutory instrument was introduced under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act, designating five or six treaties—they made quite a high pile—as Community treaties. One of those treaties altered the arrangements of the European Parliament on non-obligatory expenditure and the way in which the tennis match took place vis-á-vis the Council of Ministers. That effectively altered the treaty of Rome by way of a statutory instrument that did not even mention the treaty. The amendment to the treaty was contained in a schedule to the order. That is how the Community has been able to deal with legislation and obligations in the past, by a subterranean method; perhaps that will happen again in the future.

To ensure that there is proper control of the House, as opposed to reportage and scrutiny, which is a different function and can bring about only a certain amount of visibility, there has to be an Act of Parliament. No Government, including the present Government, should try to suggest that we demote that method in favour of some other way, as yet undefined. The Minister has not said that he thinks that a statutory instrument resolution would be better. The method could involve section 1(3) or any one of all sorts of other means. So the Minister is using subterranean tactics, which are too flexible for comfort in this highly charged and vital matter of public control. Does the Minister wish me to give way to him now?

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent.*

Sir Teddy Taylor: After our experience involving merchant shipping and the Spanish fishermen, is not it rather silly to try to pretend that Acts of Parliament passed by the House can any longer give rights to the people of Britain? In connection with what the Minister said about article K, if there were an agreement by unanimity that we should, for example, allow the entry of 100,000 people from eastern Europe, and if that required parliamentary legislation and the House rejected that legislation, would the rights disappear? Would the 100,000 people from eastern Europe have no rights, simply because the Houses of Parliament had turned the legislation down? After all the Acts that we have passed and all the treaties that we have agreed, is it not bogus nonsense to pretend that Acts of Parliament can afford any protection now, when they can be overturned by European agreements interpreted by the European Court?

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman tempts me down a road that I do not wish to travel because for once the Minister and I agree that the matter relates to parliamentary procedure. I should be adducing the same argument if I were on the Government Benches, even if I were in favour of the Bill.

What the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) says may or may not be true, but it is clear from the Minister's remarks that citizens of the United Kingdom are being deprived of the right to peruse a parliamentary measure that has been published and put on the Table and on which there must be a Second Reading, Committee stage, Third Reading and perhaps a Report stage in another place. They are being deprived of the opportunity to know what is being done in their name by their representatives as a result of the sort of decision that the Minister is taking today. In that respect, he is not only taking away power from the people and this House, but at the same time is reducing visibility.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The House knows that, even if the hon. Gentleman were on these Benches, he would be arguing the same case with the same vehemence. I shall not labour the point further, but his problem is that he has never accepted the treaty of Rome.

The hon. Gentleman might have reminded the House that the judicial review to which he referred was won by the Government of the day and that that Government chose afterwards to proceed by way of an Act. There should be choice in such matters, with the right legislative method being adopted in each case.

There being many experienced hon. Members present, I need not labour the point that the hon. Gentleman seemed to imply that section 1(3) orders were a kind of pushover. In fact, they require affirmative resolutions in both Houses. The hon. Gentleman is slightly spinning the ball in the wrong direction on that matter.

Mr. Spearing: I agree that that judicial review was lost by the person who brought it, now deceased. But is the Minister really saying that if that had not been challenged in the courts, the Government would have produced an Act? Of course not. The order in question was printed and laid. Was not it legitimate for a citizen of this country to bring the matter into the open? I agree that the Government of the day, perhaps using their wise discretion, took a certain course. Even the present Government occasionally wander into the area of wise discretions, as they did earlier today when they accepted some amendments.

The Conservative Government under the previous premiership may not have been too good at doing that. They did not see some of the rocks ahead. But the present Government are more sapient in that respect. Why should the citizen be denied the opportunity to erect warning lights, even by taking court action? The fact that the Minister reminds us that the case was lost, and that the Government took some notice of it, reinforces my point.

The Minister claims that statutory instruments are no pushover. I accept that on occasions they may not be, but he knows from his experience of many years in office that on certain days, when business is light after the main debate and an instrument comes up after 10 o'clock, it is not difficult to get through important abstruse matters after a one and a half hour debate. As for visibility, a statutory instrument does not have the visibility of a Bill.

I reinforce the important points made my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney relating to new clause 4 and foreign and security policy. I

[Mr. Spearing]

want the Minister of State to comment on that subject as I do not understand it. People think that I have read the treaty many times, but I am mystified by the specific sequence of events. It is important because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said, we have recently expressed a unanimous decision on Croatia—on which there were various views that I shall not adumbrate.

12.45 am

Article J.3 states:

"1. Whenever the Council decides on the principle of joint action, it shall lay down the specific scope, the Union's general and specific objectives in carrying out such action, if necessary its duration, and the means, procedures and conditions for its implementation.

2. The Council shall, when adopting the joint action and at any stage during its development, define those matters on which decisions are to be taken by a qualified majority. Where the Council is required to act by a qualified majority pursuant to the preceding subparagraph, the votes of its members shall be weighted in accordance with Article 148(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, and for their adoption, acts of the Council shall require at least fifty-four votes in favour, cast by at least eight members."

I am puzzled about the stage at which there is a change of gear. The Council—I presume, the Foreign Affairs Council—is simultaneously acting in various dimensions. It is dealing with scope, general objectives, specific objectives, duration, means, procedures and conditions for implementation. The treaty states that the Council shall

"when adopting the joint action"—

presumably in the process of deciding to do so—

"and at any stage during its development"—

foreign affairs certainly develop—

"define those matters on which decisions are to be taken by a qualified majority."

It does not state which form of voting will be used to do so. It does not state whether the voting will have to be unanimous. The treaty is a difficult one to read and no doubt somewhere within it—the article may be at the fingertips of the Minister of State, who may be present in the Council where the voting is being held—is the procedure to be followed when decisions are being taken on whether to move from common action to that requiring a qualified majority vote. Perhaps such a move would require a unanimous vote. A well-laid-out treaty should state the means by which that decision is made.

Therefore, I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. It would be for the benefit of the country and the House to know if, when that change of gear takes place, subsequent assent is needed to a policy that is to be a common policy. There have been difficulties in Europe—in former Yugoslavia—and we can imagine problems anywhere in the world to which the procedure would apply. We can imagine it being applied to problems that we have experienced in the past two or three years. What would happen within the joint Council when the matter is decided by a qualified majority vote? How would the House retain its influence and control? At present, on anything that is tabled in co-operation or unanimity, the House can have an Adjournment debate and the supporters can chunter away in the Members' Lobby, the Tea Room, or by letter or deputation, and tell the Foreign Secretary what they are willing to tolerate. They have probably been doing that over recent events. The Government know that they must keep within those lines—that is the hidden force of Members of Parliament.

However, if the matter is decided on qualified majority voting, the Minister can bargain. We know what happens in the European Community—there is package bargaining in the Council. If a matter is to be decided by qualified majority voting, one decision is offset against another. That is done in the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is—and always was—part of the treaty. One of the functions of that Committee, which is not often mentioned in the House and about which I know a little, is that of a sort of bargaining place where one makes a minor concession to gain what one considers to be a major concession. It is, in a sense, a policy market and it has a currency. If I am wrong, the Minister will correct me. Perhaps he will clarify two points. First, on change of gear, how and by what method is it achieved? Secondly, although we are not voting on it as unfortunately it has not been selected, in those circumstances, why should not the House control that Minister, who might well be outvoted anyway, by resolution rather than by general debate and what passes for scrutiny?

Mr. Garel-Jones: In passing, let me ask the hon. Gentleman a question. Were it appropriate, would he like to see similar controls over decisions taken by unanimity in the Security Council of the United Nations, or is it just the Community that he finds offensive? Unanimity is the general rule for common and security policy as set out in article J.8(2):

"The Council shall act unanimously, except for procedural questions and in the case referred to in Article j.3(2)."

That means that any decisions to use qualified voting will be taken by unanimity.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification and simply express the thought that it might have been better drafted by putting it in a different place in the treaty. However, we are relieved to know that that is so.

The Minister asked me a personal question about the Security Council, but I do not consider it to be comparable. The United Nations, which many of us heavily support, is an international organisation in which individual nations get together and fulfil their roles, co-operating where they can and, one hopes, all the time, but our Foreign Secretary and our Prime Minister speak for the United Kingdom.

The treaty will require a certain amount of harmonisation even in the United Nations, as in every international forum, and that will blunt the originality in foreign affairs for which the United Kingdom is known. Be that as it may, I would answer the Minister's question by saying that it is a different matter. In many foreign policy matters, we will have a common policy, some of which may be subject to qualified majority voting. It is entirely different.

I know that the Secretary of State has said in that beautiful way of his—he is very skilled—"But this is nothing more than we have at the moment. We have it under title 3 of the Single European Act. We have come together under political co-operation; we shall have a few more political directives and hot it up a bit, but it is only putting into treaty form what we already have." However, it is not. What we have at the moment is co-operation, or so we are told by the Foreign Secretary, in which any

member state is free to say, "I am sorry, but we cannot go along with that," and they exercise their common judgment.

As the Minister said, states do not have to come to a common view on anything. However, there is pressure in article J to reach a common view and a presumption that, where possible, we shall come to a common foreign policy. I am glad that the Minister is nodding in agreement. The presumption to come to that common view is stronger than the desirability in the Single European Act. The Minister now shakes his head, but any reading of the treaty comparing the two groups of articles would suggest that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stephney referred to Croatia. May I refer the Minister to the Foreign Secretary's words in one of the last debates in Committee? When tackled on the matter, he said that it was perfectly true that the Germans were changed in their view on the recognition of Croatia. He said that if it had not been for the necessity for a common decision, the Germans would have recognised Croatia earlier than was the case. He then said that the United Kingdom would have recognised Croatia some time earlier than was the case. I do not have the exact words, but I know that they were something of that kind. The Foreign Secretary did not say how much sooner the United Kingdom would have recognised Croatia. We are now in a different ballgame altogether and I am surprised that the Minister denies that.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In the United Nations, an organisation that the hon. Gentleman and I strongly support, the United Kingdom seeks, along with other members of the Security Council, to arrive, whenever it can, at consensus and unanimous decisions. The hon. Gentleman, I and most hon. Members regard such international co-operation as a good thing. It is, of course, true that in the context of the United Nations, the United Kingdom sometimes makes concessions and sometimes makes changes to its policy to arrive at international agreement. The hon. Gentleman approves of that. I do not understand why he does not approve of similar efforts to co-operate with other nation states in a European context. I believe that the reasons is that the hon. Gentleman has never accepted either the treaty of Rome or Britain's membership of the Community, and that he is obsessed about those matters.

Mr. Spearing: One may not go along with a particular Act, perhaps because one is in opposition. The Minister was not here when his party was in opposition. Is he saying that, just because a certain Government are in power and because certain Acts of Parliament are enshrined in the law of the state, one must go along with those laws? Of course, one must obey them. Is the Minister saying that one must stop arguing against them or saying that they are wrong in principle? Even his hon. Friends said, time after time, that the poll tax was wrong in principle. Is the Minister denying their right to say that?

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Spearing: The Minister says no. What difference is there between the right of hon. Members to dissent from an Act of Parliament or a policy imposed by one Government and their right, in a measured, logical, careful and accurate way, to dissent from a change in the constitution of this land?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not dispute the hon. Gentleman's right to dissent. It is already well established that qualified majority voting can be agreed to only by unanimity. I am making a genuine effort to understand why the hon. Gentleman finds co-operation between member states in the United Nations so laudable and why he finds similar efforts to co-operate with member states in the European context so offensive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The debate is straying somewhat beyond the group of new clauses. May we get back to the new clauses, please?

Mr. Spearing: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am referring to new clause 4 which relates to the lack of a resolution on a single foreign policy. There is a great difference between co-operation between nations that are members of the United Nations and the position of members of the Community which are bound together by much more than co-operation. They are bound together by a structure of authority.

To return to the main question of the debate, we are debating the question of by what authority changes in the structure of that authority are made My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney made a powerful case for the House agreeing to or not agreeing to those changes by Act of Parliament. The Minister, in his speech and in his interventions, has dissembled on that point by saying that the House must retain flexibility.

I put it to him that what he wishes to retain is not the power of the House, but the power of any Government of the day to get round what otherwise might be the proper procedures of the House in relation to treaty changes, changes that should be made only by Act of Parliament in the full procedure of those Acts, so that the British public knows what is going on and hon. Members have the maximum opportunity to control the Government of the day.

I am

Mr. George Robertson: I rise to contribute briefly to this interesting debate. I do not intend to take the time of the House to deal with the new clauses which have not been selected; that will be a mercy to the House as well as to me. I would, however, like to comment on new clause 2, the Second Reading of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) moved and which I think he will accept is the most important of the new clauses in this group.

There is considerable difficulty for the House, for those of us who are interested and those of us who are obliged to be interested, when Madam Speaker makes a selection for the debate ahead of us at 12 noon, because it is hard to give attention to the detail in the new clauses in the available time. So if my right hon. Friend thinks that his new clause has received inadequate attention and that perhaps I have come to it late in the day—or late in the morning, as it now is—he will not be surprised at what has happened, because we were both standing in the No Lobby at 12 noon today, waiting to see which of the large number of new clauses and amendments had been selected for debate by Madam Speaker.

[Mr. George Robertson]

The question before us this morning, therefore, is whether we should accept, or whether I should recommend to Labour Members that we support, my right hon. Friend's new clause 2 which would impose a requirement that in future, where there is any change in the voting procedure in the Council of Ministers or where the treaty prescribes that respective constitutional requirements be put in place, it can be done in this country only by Act of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) have given a number of examples where they are afraid of significant changes taking place in the voting procedure or where it might well be circumvented or where an Act of Parliament procedure would not be involved. The Minister, however, has made it clear that in the case of the changes that would be required by article 8e and by article K.9 of the treaty an Act of Parliament would be involved. He has given that assurance to the House this evening, and it is now on the record.

The issue with which we must concern ourselves now, therefore, is whether the prescription that my right hon. Friend lays down in the new clause is appropriate in all other situations that might come up. The Minister has sought to persuade the House that we should not lay down procedures in an Act of Parliament that would bind the House in the future. He said so with some conviction but not necessarily with great persuasiveness. What we must decide is whether my right hon. Friend seeks to cover too many instances in too heavy-handed a fashion perhaps and whether, to borrow a phrase already employed by the Minister, we are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut—or several nuts.

I should like to come at my right hon. Friend from a different direction, however, briefly. I am not convinced —and when tomorrow he reads the Labour party's new policy document on Europe he will see a line of reasoning there—that an Act of Parliament is the most appropriate way for us to give proper scrutiny to the sort of measures that he put forward. In the past, I have shared his dissatisfaction with the way in which the House deals with EC business, and I have thought that we should strengthen our scrutiny procedures. The setting up of European Standing Committees A and B was due in part to pressure exerted by my Front-Bench colleagues and me, to make sure that some of this legislation was given more detailed attention.

Some of the policy documents quoted by my hon. Friends have suggested the creation of a European Grand Committee, in part composed of some of the Members who are here at this ungodly hour and who might more regularly and consistently look at general issues of policy connected with the European Community. All too infrequently do we debate some of the most weighty issues raised by my right hon. Friend this evening.

I have always believed that the Ponsonby procedures governing the ratification of treaties were inadequate. It seems crazy that the House may be asked, in Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, to give detailed consideration to the diplomatic immunity that will attach to inspectors who come under arms control treaties, but that it will have no opportunity to discuss the arms control treaties themselves. We may discuss the treaty on European union only because it requires changes in United Kingdom law. We were able to discuss the parts of the treaty that do not require such changes only because amendments were tabled, often by me, to include such parts of the treaty in our law.

There is an admirable case to be made for looking again at the way in which the House treats these matters. I believe, however, that the new clause is unduly prescriptive. It might be too burdensome if we demanded that the House pass an Act of Parliament each time these issues are considered. I believe that this ratification process is infinitely preferable to a referendum because, over a lengthy period, the House has been able to discuss the complex issues surrounding the treaty, often adding to the education of people inside and outside the House.

Sometimes, though, an Act of Parliament is not the best procedure. In the context of the new thinking which will have to be completed on how best to scrutinise European legislation, I fear that my right hon. Friend's new clause is both too demanding and too restrictive, and I cannot recommend that my hon. Friends support it in the Lobby this evening. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not press it to a Division at this stage.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 38, Noes 275.

Division No. 256] **[1.08 am**

AYES

Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Barnes, Harry
Bennett, Andrew F.
Boyce, Jimmy
Budgen, Nicholas
Cash, William
Cohen, Harry
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Gill, Christopher
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lord, Michael
McWilliam, John
Marlow, Tony
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Spearing and
Mr. Ted Rowlands.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Andrew Mackay.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): For the convenience of the House, let me make it clear that the Chair understands that new clause 22 has been withdrawn.

Clause 1

TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION

Amendment made: No. 43, in page 1, line 9, leave out from 'II' to 'III' in line 13.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

PETITION

Colin Albert Jennison

1.21 am

Ms Majorie Mowlam (Redcar): I am pleased to have the opportunity to present to the House a petition on behalf of many inhabitants of Cleveland who are deeply concerned and worried by the sentence passed on Mr. Colin Albert Jennison of two years for the manslaughter of his wife Elizabeth. It calls on the Attorney-General to review the policy of sentencing of those found guilty of the manslaughter of wives.

To lie upon the Table.

Pornography

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

1.22 am

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I come to this Adjournment debate with mixed feelings. I am pleased to have won the opportunity to raise again the concern that I and many colleagues in all parts of the House feel about the availability of explicit and violent pornography in this country, through an increasingly wide range of technological media. I am saddened that the debate is necessary and that the House will have to listen again to a Minister seeking to persuade us that all is well, that action is under way on a number of fronts, and that the key statute in this area, the Obscene Publications Act 1959, should be left well alone. At least, that is what I expect the Minister to say, but I shall be delighted if I am proved wrong and he chooses the opportunity to announce the fundamental review of the test of obscenity in the 1959 Act that is so necessary.

I will come in a moment to the individual types of technology that can now be used to transmit pornography, but the initial focus of concern, in the House and outside, last spring and summer was an horrific example of degrading material produced on what is an old form of technology, the printing press. I refer, of course, to the book "Juliette" published by Arrow Books in 1991 and containing a litany of extremely violent acts against children, women, the mentally ill—indeed, anyone who was available to be tortured, raped, sexually assaulted and murdered. The publication of such material evoked great concern in this House, and after a briefing paper containing extracts had been made available to honourable Members early-day motion 312 quickly obtained over 100 signatures.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), in her first Adjournment debate, chose to raise the issue and expressed astonishment that the Director of Public Prosecutions had decided that action against the book under the 1959 Act was unlikely to succeed. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) told the Minister that, in 15 years in the Army, he had never seen such horrific material as that contained in "Juliette". The best that the Minister could do in response to that pressure was to argue that

"a number of well-rounded measures exist to deal with pornography as it occurs."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. 1068.]

I have emphasised the case of "Juliette" at some length because if our law is inadequate to deal with what is an extremely old form of technology—publishing—I seriously question how effective it can be for newer forms of technology which are more sophisticated and change with each passing day.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) picked up that concern when he sought leave to introduce a ten-minute Bill on 27 October 1992. He drew attention to the problems of satellite television and computer pornography. He described the 1959 Act as the keystone in the legislative arch dealing with pornography —but, sadly, a keystone that was crumbling.

The responses that we received from the Government to all that parliamentary concern was hesitant and mixed. There had been one meeting at the Home Office in July,

and although the Minister listened carefully, nothing was promised. A meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister then took place in November. I am glad to say that we received a more positive response from my right hon. Friend who showed great personal concern about the kinds of pornography available and, in particular, the difficulties proposed by new technology. We were assured that the Home Office would look at the matter more closely.

Many more hon. Members realised the true extent of the problem when the hard-working officers of the obscene publications squad of the Metropolitan police at Scotland Yard came to the House on 24 and 25 February this year to put on an exhibition of the kinds of material with which they have to deal daily, and the need for tougher laws. Some 300 Members of both House of Parliament attended that exhibition over the two days. Members did not attend out of some prurient interest but to satisfy themselves whether the concerns that others expressed were based on fact or fiction.

The exhibition included all kinds of material. Extracts from "Juliette" were again displayed. Material from pornographic magazines was on show. Child pornography in all its horror was depicted graphically, through photographs and video material. Adult video pornography, including films certified by the British Board of Film Classification as so-called "sex education", were shown, as were excerpts from the notorious Red Hot Dutch television channel. A computer was also available to demonstrate the problems of that technology.

Since that event, the Home Office has sought to suggest that virtually all the material on display was illegal under the current law. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister repeated that claim in a letter to me last week. I have to say that that is not the information that I have received from the Metropolitan police, from the Attorney-General or from the Crown Prosecution Service. Some of the material on display, especially the child pornography, has been the subject of successful prosecutions under current law, but even in that area prosecutions against computerised child pornography have run into problems. I have already mentioned how "Juliette" could not be acted against, and Red Hot Dutch television is currently the subject of action, the impact of which we have yet to see. At the exhibition, the Metropolitan police described the difficulties that they have with the current law. It is disingenuous to suggest that those difficulties lie only with enforcement and plugging minor gaps. Any positive action is welcome, but a fundamental review is necessary.

That brings me to the problems of particular technological media. I refer briefly to videos, telephone pornography, computers and satellite television. The video recorder has transformed the lifestyles of many people in this country. Sadly, however, as seems to be the case with many things that bring pleasure, there are sleazy business men who seek to exploit a commercial opportunity through demeaning and degrading others. Video nasties quickly became the scourge of our society in the early 1980s and were dealt with only after my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) introduced his private Member's Bill which became the Video Recordings Act 1984. The regulatory system introduced in that Act has largely worked well. But in the past couple of years signs have emerged that the pornographers have found new ways of getting around the 1984 Act and have thrown the interpretation of the 1959 Act obscenity test into further doubt.

In 1991, the British Board of Film Classification decided to grant a certificate to a video purporting to be sex education. I am advised that that film, taken on its own and viewed by a couple who are committed partners, could have some benefit. However, many warned at the time that that type of film was bending the standard and that pornographers would be quick to exploit it. They were right.

The BBFC's latest annual report includes recognition by the board that it might have to relax standards for videos having no educational purpose available in sex shops—the so-called R18 category—because of the explicitness of scenes in sex education videos.

Scotland Yard's obscene publications squad also reported that, in its view, some so-called sex education material is as explicit as other videos that it had previously prosecuted under the 1959 Act. It seems that the BBFC is wrongly seeking to become the arbiter of what is obscene rather than the courts.

Another new medium greatly exploited by pornographers in the past eight years is premium rate telephone services—0898 numbers. I will not rehearse here the ins and outs of that particular industry because the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis)—whom I admire for his vigilance—has done so many times in the House, most recently in his Adjournment debate on 14 December last year.

I am pleased to say that there are, in that regard, some grounds for encouragement. In common with many right hon. and hon. Members, I have not been impressed over the years with the premium rate telephone industry's self-regulatory body—the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone Information Services. It is difficult to have confidence in a body that had to revise its draft code of practice six times in as many years to regulate an industry that is worth more than £200 million per annum.

Moreover, when we consider that the chairman of that body for most of its six years' of existence was quoted in the *The Mail on Sunday* on 25 February 1990 as saying

"I couldn't care a hoot. Why shouldn't people engage in private conversatons about pornography?",

the House will understand why one had little confidence in the ICSTIS. It now has a new chairman, Brenda Dean, whom I met last week to discuss how she is tackling the problems. I wish her well in her new appointment.

No advertisements for such lines should appear in any publication, other than those that might be found on the top shelf in a newsagent. I do not understand why such degrading services should be available from every home in the United Kingdom that has a telephone. Telephone subscribers should be able to receive such services only if they deliberately choose to opt in. The current system of call barring is akin to closing the gate after the horse has bolted.

As to satellite television, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will state tonight the current state of the Government's action against Red Hot Dutch. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage decided before Easter that decoders that enable customers to receive that obscene channel could be banned by the British Government within the terms of European agreements on transfrontier television.

[Mrs. Ann Winterton]

I ask him to describe how the Government intend to keep ahead of a commercial company that is determined to make money from that pornographic service and plans to exploit other technological means of ensuring that its signal gets through.

My hon. Friend the Minister may be interested to know that my inquiries suggest that such material is now broadcast on television in Denmark, from where the signal now emanates. But the Danes—rather lamely—will not take action against Red Hot Dutch themselves.

What further action do the Government plan against continental television, especially against the service being broadcast to existing subscribers? What if the programmes are recorded on video from an individual's television set and the videos begin to circulate, as I believe they will? Will action be taken against those videos?

Can my hon. Friend tell us anything more about newspaper reports that the German Government have requested that action be taken against the "adult channel" that may be broadcast to Germany from the United Kingdom? I am pleased that some other European countries are beginning to see such matters in the way that many in this country do.

Computers are increasingly posing problems for the police. A particular difficulty is one that Scotland Yard explained at the time of its exhibition in the House—when a picture is generated by computer which superimposes a child's head on an adult body. Apparently, the courts have decided that such an image cannot be deemed to be that of a child. I consider that decision monstrous, and I believe that the Government must close the loophole as soon as possible.

However, other aspects of computer technology are even more worrying. I think in particular of developments in what is called "virtual reality", in which three-dimensional images can be created by computer and projected through a special headset. This amazing technology then allows the individual to interact with the image so that it is, as the name suggests, virtual reality. Such technology can clearly have benefit—for example, in training for complicated technical tasks—but what pornographer would pass up the opportunity to make money from marketing interactive sexual acts, including those against children? I wonder what will be the Government's response to that horrific development.

I cannot claim that the Government have been wholly inactive in response to these various developments. The picture that comes to my mind to describe their response is that of the small boy in the story from Holland who seeks to keep the water from coming through the dyke by putting his finger in the hole. I see a lot of energy being expended by Ministers seeking to find small holes which they can try and plug with limited action; but my hon. Friend is rapidly running out of fingers.

I do not believe that that is good enough. Of course, any action that restricts pornography is welcome, but short-term fixes are not sufficient. The real problems lie with the structure of the dyke itself—in this case, the Obscene Publications Act 1959. I urge the Government to face up to that fact and to undertake the review that is so desperately necessary. Responding to each new technological development individually is wholly inadequate. Individual Acts of Parliament such as the Video Recordings Act 1984 may produce an element of control of a new medium for a period; but the 1959 Act is the underpinning measure that must cope until such legislation is introduced, and must provide the overall framework. While that framework is weak and unsound, other actions will have limited effect.

It is clear to me from the letter that I received from the Prime Minister that his advice from the Home Office is badly flawed. The Prime Minister draws particular attention in his letter to the example of "Juliette", which I mentioned at the start of my speech. He describes it as "truly horrifying". The police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Attorney-General said that a prosecution in this case could not be made because of the inadequate 1959 Act test of obscenity; yet the Home Office stubbornly refuses to review that test.

The question that my hon. Friend must answer tonight is this: does he disagree with the Attorney-General, the Crown Prosecution Service and the police who say that they cannot secure convictions in some of the worst cases because of the fundamental weakness of the Act? Does he not share the Prime Minister's desire—expressed last week in that letter to me—to see more effective action taken against the worst kind of pornography? If he understands those difficulties and shares those concerns, he will now announce the fundamental review of the law for which we have been pressing.

1.39 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Jack): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on securing this Adjournment debate. I regret that it may not be possible in the time left for me to reply to every point that she raised, but I undertake to deal with any points that I leave unanswered in correspondence with her.

My hon. Friend asked me about the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The position of the Home Office remains as stated in the Prime Minister's letter, to which she referred. I have, however, done as much as possible to acquaint myself with some of the degrading, vile, filthy and disgusting material to which she rightly drew my attention in earlier debates.

I have visited the obscene publications squads in Manchester and at Scotland Yard and have spent many hours looking at the technology that my hon. Friend so graphically described. She did the House a considerable service by arranging for the Scotland Yard exhibition to be shown here so that right hon. and hon. Members could become acquainted with this type of material.

I shall start where I intend to finish—by talking about what we have been doing since my hon. Friend raised the subject with the Prime Minister at that meeting. I undertook to look at what could be done about this vile trade. An effective way of dealing with pornography is to hit the pornographer in the pocket. These people are in this business for profit. Effective enforcement of the law is a good way of dealing with the problem.

We are looking at ways of strengthening police powers of arrest for those who would seek to trade in all kinds of pornography, including child pornography.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend took up a considerable amount of the time allocated to the debate. If she wants me to reply to it, I have fewer than 10 minutes in which to do so. I hope that she will allow me to make some progress.

We are exploring ways in which to improve the powers of the police properly to investigate the methods and business affairs of large-scale pornographers. We are examining ways in which the effectiveness of certain search warrants can be improved. We are assessing also how the important powers that the police currently enjoy to seize obscene articles can be streamlined and speeded up.

Those measures are the result of talking to the same people as those to whom my hon. Friend talked—Scotland Yard and the obscene publications squad in Manchester. Having listened to those officers, I formed the judgment that by improving the effectiveness of our enforcement procedures we shall start to bear down on this trade.

As for other matters to which my hon. Friend referred, my constituency, too, has been blighted by the arrival of so-called hi-tech pornography. One of my constituents, Mr. Jeffries, has received a lot of publicity because of his so-called hole-in-the-wall pornography machine. I condemn him for causing so much discomfort and upset to my constituents. However, what he did brought home to me just how strongly good, ordinary folk feel about the issues to which my hon. Friend referred. It underlines the importance of the exhibition that my hon. Friend helped to organise in the House.

My hon. Friend asked how the law could be brought to bear on some of these so-called hi-tech, or 21st century, pornographers. For the record, I would point out that it still remains the case that it is an offence under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 to publish for gain, or to possess for publication, any obscene article. That offence is punishable by an unlimited fine, or three years' imprisonment, or both. That law applies to computer disks in the way that it applies to other articles. It applies equally to satellite television broadcasts and to other television broadcasts.

My hon. Friend might wonder whether the law has in fact been used. In 1992, the Metropolitan police seized 1,000 computer disks under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. In the same year, the Greater Manchester force seized more than 1,500 disks. In addition, in 1991, 218 persons in England and Wales were convicted of the serious offence of trading in pornography of all kinds. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point about prosecutorial difficulties. The impression can sometimes be created that the law is unable to act, but it does act.

Expertise is also very important. The work of those involved in Greater Manchester who have a particular knowledge of computer technology is being made more widely available. My officials are considering how best their knowledge can be spread to other police forces which may wish to take action in this sphere. I shall certainly do all that I can to encourage that development.

One of the problems that I and my hon. Friend encountered involved the operation of so-called "bulletin boards" to transmit explicit material down the telephone system into computers. As I said, there are controls over computer disks in the 1959 Act and legal controls over the transmission of pornographic images between computers in cases where no disks change hands. Under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 it is a criminal offence to send over a public telecommunication any message or other matter which is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character. That is another example of the law working. That offence would catch an individual —for example, a computer buff—who transmitted a pornographic image over the telephone to a friend, and it is currently subject to a maximum penalty of a level 3 fine, or £1,000. To take up another of my hon. Friend's points, the Government are committed to increasing the penalty for that offence, which also covers those who make nuisance phone calls and provide indecent or obscene "adult" telephone services. I wish to emphasise that point to my hon. Friend.

A moment ago I mentioned bulletin boards. They are also specifically caught by the Broadcasting Act 1990. Material in the form of a visual image comes under the definition of what is called a "programme service" and is caught by section 201 of the Broadcasting Act, so modern computerised pornography can be dealt with under the law in two ways.

My hon. Friend mentioned something which I certainly found very distasteful, the construction by means of computer of the image of a child. I found it profoundly revolting, and I share her concerns about the difficulties of the law in that regard. Thankfully, so far only one example is known, but I assure my hon. Friend that I shall watch the situation closely. I noted carefully what she said. I have seen it for myself, and I think I know how she feels about it. If necessary, we can consider ways in which the law can be strengthened to deal with such imagery.

My hon. Friend did not mention the question of computer games, which I have read about in the newspapers. She touched on the issue when she spoke of her concern about "virtual reality". The definition of a video work in the Video Recordings Act 1984 covers computer games which include moving images, but they are generally exempt from classification. However, that exemption does not apply to games that show human sexual activity, the mutilation or torture of, or gross violence towards, human beings or animals, or human genital organs. If such games are supplied or offered illegally, or possessed for the purpose of supply, without having been submitted to the British Board of Film Classification for classification, those responsible are guilty of an offence and are liable to a fine of £20,000.

The enforcement of the Video Recordings Act 1984, which my hon. Friend mentioned, is currently being strengthened by a Bill being taken through the other place with the Government's support by Lord Birkett. The measure will be introduced in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton will wish to support it.

My hon. Friend also mentioned satellite pornography and asked about the attitude of other European countries to that development. Time does not permit me to go into detail, but, as my hon. Friend knows, that area of policy is within the remit of the Department of National Heritage, and I undertake to draw her remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State for National Heritage and to ensure that she receives a full and proper reply to her questions.

We have been considering carefully many of the matters about which my hon. Friend spoke, and I hope that we are aware of the way in which technology—I have already mentioned virtual reality—is expanding the opportunities for pornography. I emphasise that we shall monitor developments carefully. I have thought about whether the

[Mr. Jack]

law as it stands can deal with such matters, and I hope that I have proved that the law can act, and has indeed been used. Like my hon. Friend, I am in close touch with the Metropolitan police and with the Manchester obscene publications squad, and I am watching the situation carefully.

Sex education videos are subject both to the Video Recordings Act 1984 and to the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The board's classification does not give immunity from prosecution for obscenity, but the context is important. The "deprave or corrupt" test and the "public good" defence are designed to be applied case by case. It is not true to say that certain types of image are always prohibited; sex education videos may lawfully show images that would not be permitted in other videos. I believe that the BBFC acts conscientiously and responsibly in dealing with those and other difficult matters, but I promise my hon. Friend that I shall keep a close eye on these many difficult issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

DUNHAM BRIDGE (AMENDMENT) BILL
Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Carstairs-Edinburgh Rail Services

1. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in favour of reinstating rail services from Carstairs to Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations from local interested parties about rail services from Carstairs to Edinburgh. The detailed operation of the railways, including the precise level of services to be offered on individual lines, is, however, a matter for British Rail.

Mr. Hood: The Minister is aware that Carstairs rail junction used to be known as the gateway to Scotland. Is he further aware that since InterCity ceased to stop trains at Carstairs, my 50,000 Clydesdale constituents have been deprived of rail services to the capital city of Scotland? Will he reflect on what he has told the House and arrange a meeting—a meeting that I would want to attend—to encourage InterCity to reinstate rail services between Carstairs and Edinburgh? That would not only open up employment and cultural pursuits for my 50,000 constituents but open up the Clyde valley for tourism.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The detailed operation of the railways, including the precise level of services on individual lines is, at present, a matter for British Rail. British Rail is encouraged to tailor its service to meet the markets concerned. The Secretary of State for Transport, because of his overall responsibilities for railways, may, however, give British Rail such directions as he thinks fit, with regard to recommendations made by transport users' consultative committees. I will certainly pass on the hon. Gentleman's representations to him.

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of that reply, I beg to give notice that I shall seek to raise this matter on the Adjournment at the earliest opportunity.

"Scotland in the Union"

2. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to assess public opinion in Scotland on his White Paper, "Scotland in the Union —a Partnership for Good", Cm. 2225.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): The response to the White Paper "Scotland in the Union—a Partnership for Good" has been generally very favourable.

Mr. Canavan: If the Secretary of State is still afraid to take up my suggestion of a referendum along the lines set out in my Bill, will he take up an alternative suggestion to test the White Paper proposal for an enhanced role for the Scottish Grand Committee? Will the Government table a substantive motion for a full-day debate in Scotland in that Committee and give the Opposition parties the opportunity to table, debate and vote on amendments to it so that the Government can ascertain, and act upon, the majority view of the elected representatives of the people of Scotland, most of whom want a real Scottish parliament rather than the Mickey Mouse White Paper, which proposes no genuine transfer of voting power from this place?

Mr. Lang: A referendum was not part of the proposals that we included in the White Paper, and we do not contemplate proceeding in that direction; nor was the suggestion that we should establish a separate Scottish parliament. Central to the White Paper was our commitment to maintaining the integrity of this Parliament of the United Kingdom. As to the views of other parties, I shall be consulting in due course and there will be opportunities, if any amendments to Standing Orders are required, for such matters to be debated.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: As the Government flounder for a new bank holiday, may I suggest that it should be on 1 May? That would give the Opposition the impression that it was union day, when it was actually the day on which the treaty of Union 1707 came into force and it is one of the most important circumstances in our history.

Mr. Lang: My hon. and learned Friend makes an interesting suggestion. It is worth noting that the May day holiday has existed in Scotland for more than 100 years. It existed long before the Labour party and it will probably long outlast the Labour party.

Mr. Salmond: Is not one of the key arguments in "Partnership for Good" for a new relationship within the United Kingdom, with Scotland's subordinate position being changed? Has the Secretary of State deployed that new relationship with the oil tax changes announced in the Budget? Did he know about them before they were announced? Does he now understand that they will cost thousands of jobs in Scotland? Has he done anything since the Budget to try to alter the changes—or has he just been, in Lord Boothby's term, the scullery maid of the Cabinet attempting to clear up the mess that his political betters have left behind?

Mr. Lang: Only an hon. Member with the inferiority complex of the hon. Gentleman would regard Scotland's role as in any way subordinate. Scotland is a full partner in the United Kingdom and our White Paper "Scotland in the Union—a Partnership for Good" reasserts that. Within this unitary Parliament and within this United

Kingdom, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is responsible for taxation matters. I am sure that he will take careful note of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is no better commendation of the White Paper than the words of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) who, at a recent Scottish Grand Committee meeting, pleaded for the Minister responsible for health to be present? For the benefit of those on the Opposition Front Bench, will my right hon. Friend explain that the implementation of "Scotland in the Union" would permit that Minister to participate in future Scottish Grand Committees? Does he agree that all hon. Members should join the hon. Member for Maryhill in welcoming our right hon. and learned Friend from another place?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend has identified an important point in the White Paper. Its proposals include providing an opportunity for greater scrutiny of Scottish Office Ministers, including the opportunity to ask questions of Ministers from another place. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be interested in pursuing that opportunity.

Mr. Galloway: Is not it true that the White Paper "Scotland in the Union—a Partnership for Good" has been received in our country with all the joy that a paperback edition of "Satanic Verses" might have been received had it arrived in down-town Tehran? Is not it also true that the long labour to produce that White Paper has been followed by what looks to be an equally long period of "due course"—as the Secretary of State puts it—before the Government take stock of the Opposition's responses?

Frankly, is not it an excuse for the Government doing nothing—nothing at all—about the democratic deficit in our country? Why does not the right hon. Gentleman do the simple thing and allow the Scottish people to give their opinion in a democratic referendum that would be worthy of a Government?

Mr. Lang: Perhaps I do not get about as much as the hon. Gentleman, but I do not know what sells in down-town Tehran. However, I can tell him that the publication of the White Paper received an extremely favourable response throughout Scotland. I feel sure that when we bring more detailed proposals before the House, they will find favour with the Opposition.

Sir David Steel: As the proposals in the White Paper, however welcome, are really quite minor, why has it taken so long to implement them? When will we have that first opportunity, to which the right hon. Gentleman keeps referring, to question him in the Scottish Grand Committee?

Mr. Lang: The implementation of a number of the proposals in the White Paper is already under way. I said at the time of publication that I envisaged that any amendments to the Standing Orders of the House would start in the next parliamentary Session. Between now and then, there will be an opportunity to consider what amendments might be necessary, what views people of other parties put forward, and how best to proceed.

Mr. McLeish: Is not it a disgrace that the Secretary of State should even hint at his concern for public opinion? Why is it that in Scotland, with so many people opposed to water privatisation, the right hon. Gentleman is willing to spend vast sums of taxpayers' money behind closed doors to further that issue?

Why is it that when public opinion in Scotland wants young people to be trained, the right hon. Gentleman reneges on his commitment to 7,500 potential YT trainees? This is not about a partnership for good, this is an organised hypocrisy—a conspiracy against the citizen. The Opposition believe that trust and faith in good government in Scotland will be restored only when we have a Parliament run by Labour at Westminster and a parliament in Edinburgh run by Scots for Scots.

Mr. Lang: Not only are the hon. Gentleman's figures on water and youth training places wrong, but he knows that they are wrong. He has had the facts pointed out to him and he knows how misleading he has been on those matters. However, the water case at any rate will be aired in future questions when the answer will be spelt out to him.

Water Privatisation

3. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters he has received about water privatisation in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 4,834 individual responses to the consultation on water and sewerage services, and 1,237 other letters about the future of the services since 17 November last year.

Mr. Wray: Does the Minister agree that chaos and misery have been created south of the border with 8,000 disconnections in 1989-90, 21,000 in 1990-92 and another 8,000 in 1991-92 in the Thames water authority? Those are shocking figures. Seven water authorities have doubled their disconnections, while salaries for managers and directors have increased. Will the Government never learn that the people of Scotland do not want privatisation or franchising? They want to keep their water in public hands.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman, like so many of his hon. Friends, jumps to conclusions. We have put forward eight suggestions and we are quite prepared to consider other methods of sorting out water in Scotland after the unitary authorities have been introduced. At present, as the hon. Gentleman knows, there is no disconnection in Scotland. We shall have to wait and see what legislation is required. But, in the meantime, I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that local authorities in Scotland are finding plenty of ways of collecting water charges without the need for disconnection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend confirm that among the representations that he has received, there have been representations from me, which have clearly suggested that the Government of Scotland must address the fact that we no longer have a means of measuring our entitlement from the public purse, because there is no allocation to England and our share of zero is exactly that —zero? Consequently, we must examine ways in which private money can reach the Scottish water industry in order, first, to take it out of the public sector borrowing

requirement and, secondly, so that we do not use money that would otherwise be spent on hospitals and other important matters in our constituencies.

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, my hon. Friend makes a number of important points and his representations on the consultation document are being carefully analysed. What he has said is correct. A great deal of money has to be spent in future and the ways and means of providing it is part of the reason that we are dealing with the responses to the consultation document.

Mr. Tom Clarke: As the Secretary of State is leaving the Under-Secretary of State to answer all the difficult questions, will the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) tell us why the cost of privatisation has gone up so rapidly since the £50,000 estimate was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) last year? Why, having spent £100,000 on consultants, are the Government planning to spend £400,000, and where is the money going? If the latest estimate of £2·5 billion to meet EC conditions is accepted by the Government, why do not they meet the local authorities, which are perfectly capable of responding to that figure? Above all, since my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) asked the right hon. Gentleman to answer the question, will the Under-Secretary ask the Secretary of State to do what the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland did, and drop the whole crazy idea of water privatisation?

Sir Hector Monro: I certainly have not forgotten the hon. Gentleman's involvement in the matter, because for some months I have had a postcard on my desk showing the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) in a rather droochit boat, trying to catch something better than a cold. His hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central has been misleading Scotland about the cost of water in the past 24 hours. His radio discussion this morning was disgraceful, as he said that water costs had been reduced to £2·5 billion and he is totally wrong. He misread his question, which dealt solely with the European Community directive, and my answer, and he forgot the £2·5 billion required for infrastructure in Scotland, so he was wrong in both cases and he shot himself badly in both feet. The money for Quayle Munro, including the intial tranche and going through the consultation responses, was budgeted for and the rest of the money is certainly there to pay the salaries of the civil servants who are dealing with water, whichever route we decide to take.

Education

4. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on educational standards in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish education enjoys a high reputation, which is well deserved. The Government's programme of educational reform in Scotland will improve standards further, through changes in curriculum and assessment, teacher development and appraisal, the devolution of management to schools and more and better information to parents. All those initiatives are under way and yielding results.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that an important part of the improvements in education that the Government are determined to introduce is more involvement for parents in the choice of their children's schools, and that we are looking forward to the day when parents are as welcome in schools as they are in Jenners in Princes street, Edinburgh or in Marks and Spencer? Will he outline the ways in which his Department is going about giving parents greater opportunity to contribute and to choose their children's schools in Scotland, so that we can learn about it down here in the south?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I thank my hon. Friend and strongly agree. I do not believe that a little information is a dangerous thing—parents need more glasnost, not less. We have consulted on better information for parents and have received about 300 responses. We are going to take action in that connection and, by early summer, we shall have drawn up a revised circular and regulations. The two sets of regulations will be put before Parliament and will come into effect early in August. Four of the relevant subjects that we intend to cover are pupil attendance and truancy rates; school exam results; school leaver destinations; and school costs, so we are definitely taking action.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) could learn more from her area. I have a letter in front of me from a demoralised head teacher in that area, who is complaining about the Government's interference, is weary of being blamed for everything, including the moral decline of society. He states unequivocally that the people responsible are those who have been in power for the past 14 years. Does not the Minister think that the hon. Lady could learn from Scottish education, not least over testing, where changes to the national curriculum in England and Wales followed a successful campaign by parents and teachers in Scotland? Does he agree that comprehensive education has resulted in increased standards and qualifications in Scotland and that such a system, which does not reject 80 per cent. of our young people at a tender age, is good for the aspirations and talents of young people and for Scottish society? Does not the hon. Lady have a lot to learn from Scottish society and education?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All European educational systems have a certain amount to learn from each other. Testing in Scotland is designed to operate as part of our distinctive five to 14 development programme, but the principles underlying our policies are the same north and south of the border—to ensure that pupils are regularly tested against a national standard and at defined stages of the curriculum and that the results are reported to parents. Standards have risen and we have made a lot of effort, through assessment and achievement programmes, research, regular inspection and reports by inspectors—who do an extremely good job. We have information on the level of success of pupils in standard grade, higher and other awards. We have national testing, which will give the teacher a view of a pupil's progress compared with national standards—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish!"]. It certainly is not rubbish and it is being delivered.

5. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the figures for reported cases of truancy in Scottish secondary schools in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No accurate truancy figures are available for those years, but we plan to lay before Parliament this summer regulations that will require education authorities to collect comprehensive information on attendance and truancy rates, and to include those figures in school handbooks.

Mr. Robertson: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in a recent speech made in my constituency, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that truancy and juvenile crime were inextricably linked? Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that he will examine more imaginative ways of combating truancy in schools, including raising the level of parental fines and introducing the suspension or reduction of family allowance payments to the parents of wilful and persistent truants?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree that truancy can not only blight education, but because the incidence of youth crime. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 includes a provision for parents who are brought before a court in this connection——

Mrs Gorman *rose*——

Hon. Members: There goes a truant.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have a good sense of humour, but I think that we ought to proceed with Question Time.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The penalty for parents who allow their children to play truant regularly is substantial: a fine of up to £1,000, one month in prison or both. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), however, that I do not consider reducing family allowance payments made to the parents of persistent truants to be the best option at present. Many other measures can be taken, including involving parents at a very early stage; I support that.

Mr. Watson: I am glad to see that a truant from Billericay has managed to return to the fold after a brief disappearance—[HON. MEMBERS: "She is missing again."] Ah, she is missing again.

Will the Minister call for a report from the appropriate authorities, following yesterday's truancy from a Scottish airport by the international crook and contributor to Tory party funds, Asil Nadir? Will he tell us whether Mr. Nadir's passport was withdrawn—if not, why not?—and whether Group 4 Security was responsible for guarding the airport?

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is on the wrong question. The question relates to truancy in Scotland, and I have just given permission for one hon. Member to leave. Let us move on.

Local Government Reform

6. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the £55,000 paid to Touche Ross for a report by Anna Capaldi on the financing of local government reform he has asked to be returned to the Scottish Office.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): My right hon. Friend has not asked for the return of any of the fee paid to Touche Ross for its report on the financing of local government reform; nor does he intend to. The consultants delivered a helpful report on an acceptable time scale.

Mr. Dalyell: Ought the taxpayer to pay up in full for a report that is so flawed that Bruce Mackie, the Conservative leader of Tayside council, describes it as having been blown out of the water by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has secured an Adjournment debate about the matter on Friday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's question. In that debate, the issues that he has raised can be debated more fully

A wide variety of comments have been made about the Touche Ross report; however, we consider its conclusions broadly acceptable, and believe that they provide a basis for the reorganisation of Scottish local government into a single-tier system.

Mr. Kynoch: When examining the figures in the Touche Ross report and considering local government reform in Scotland, will my hon. Friend bear in mind that it is not simply a question of the number of local authorities concerned? It is also a question of the way in which those authorities will conduct their business. Is it not important for us to have well-run authorities, delivering local services efficiently?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. What will matter is exactly what local authorities do in practice under the new structure. My hon. Friend will also be interested to know that in his own region of the country, Aberdeen City district council, which is run by the Labour party, said of the Touche Ross report that

> "Many of the cost assumptions which can be checked have been shown not to be unreasonable, while further sensitivity analysis has been carried out."

That gives the lie to some of the fantastic statements that have emanated from Opposition Members on the issue.

Mr. Tom Clarke: If statements are regarded as fantastic, why does the Minister not only publish the full report but all the papers and evidence so that it is available in the public domain and people can make up their own minds? Above all, instead of this flimsy response to local government problems and a reference to an Adjournment debate, important though that is but which few people will hear about, why can there not be a proper commission and a proper review of local government, such as that which is taking place in England?

Mr. Stewart: First, I am astonished by the hon. Gentleman's question. We have published the full Touche Ross report. I am sorry that he has not read it.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot take points of order at this stage.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister has misunderstood the question.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Minister has got the question.

Mr. Stewart: I must repeat that the Touche Ross report has been published in full. Some of the fantastic figures that the hon. Gentleman has put forward in the press

about the costs of local government reorganisation are as realistic as the chances of democracy in the Monklands Labour party.

Mr. Wallace: I noticed that in answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) the Minister damned the report with faint praise. He said that its conclusions were broadly acceptable, but he did not say that they were accurate. So that we have an informed debate, not one in which fantastic figures fly around, can the Minister tell us what the cost of savings will be for each of the four different structures that were announced in the Government's consultative document, on the basis of any revised figures that he has received from Touche Ross?

Mr. Stewart: We have not received any revised figures from Touche Ross. We made it absolutely clear in the consultation paper that we would look at the figures in the light of further evidence. That is to be found in paragraphs 5.14 and 5.15 of the consultation paper. Of course we are looking at the Touche Ross figures in the light of the variety of comments upon them, even though many of them have been mutually contradictory. When we publish the White Paper we shall publish the estimates of cost associated with the preferred structure.

Mr. John Marshall: Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether the Touche Ross report referred to the benefits of compulsory competitive tendering, which has enabled local authorities to give the same or a better service, at much less cost to the taxpayer? Did the Touche Ross report also refer to the cost of nepotism, as practised in Monklands?

Mr. Stewart: The Touche Ross report did not refer to the second matter raised by my hon. Friend, although it has been widely referred to in other ways. I agree with my hon. Friend about the immense benefits that local authorities can gain by pursuing compulsory competitive tendering. That is proved by the gains that many local authorities, even under the present structure, have achieved by pursuing compulsory competitive tendering in Scotland.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, it was extremely far-seeing of you to give us an Adjournment debate on Friday.

Secretary of State (Letters)

7. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many constituents of Renfrew, West and Inverclyde have written to him at the Scottish Office in the last eight months.

Mr. Lang: Correspondence with the Scottish Office is not normally categorised by constituency, except when received from Members of Parliament. I have received 19 letters from the hon. Gentleman in the past eight months.

Mr. Graham: I warn the Secretary of State that he will be receiving more letters from my constituents and from those of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that more than 20,000 of our womenfolk and constituents are living in anguish and anger over the results—or, rather, the lack of results—of smear tests? Those women are calling on the Government to ensure that the inquiry involves no cover-up; that there is no lack of funds available to ensure that the tests are carried out speedily; and that this blunder will never ever be repeated in the health service. Will the Government ensure that there is no cover-up; that the results are circulated quickly to ensure that our constituents can sleep in peace; that the women affected are treated expeditiously, with no lack of funds to the national health service?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that I—in my statement to the House last Thursday—and my noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office have made clear the importance that we attach to the need to have this matter concluded as quickly and effectively as possible. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that nine other health boards, in collaboration with the Argyll and Clyde health board, are allowing their laboratory facilities to be used. A large batch of results should be sent out by the middle of May and most of the women involved will have heard the results of their first re-examination by the beginning of June.

Mrs. Fyfe: Although the Opposition were satisfied with the Minister's immediate response last Wednesday, questions have certainly arisen since. Why were any slides sent to a small private laboratory rather than to other NHS laboratories within Scotland, as was clearly the Minister's intention last Wednesday? How many slides were sent to that small private laboratory and why was there delay in taking up the Minister's own directive of last Wednesday that the matter should be dealt with within the health service?

Given the investigation of Inverclyde Royal hospital, questions arise about the entire screening programme for the whole of Scotland. Will the Secretary of State give an assurance this afternoon that he personally will see to it that confidence in the service is restored by ensuring that money is spent on any technology necessary to reduce the possibility of error to the minimum and by reviewing the fact that there was no legal requirement for laboratory staff to be trained in screening slides? As it was apparently possible for one laboratory to have no system for double checking, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that such a system is created throughout the health service and that women have an answer to their question—what is the point of preventive medicine if it does not prevent?

Mr. Lang: Some 2,000 slides have been processed and the results are now known. A further 1,000 slides from the original 2,000 that were sent to Mediscreen will be reported on by Friday. The remaining 16,000 slides are being sent to other NHS laboratories and, as I told the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), we hope that a large batch of results will be announced by mid-May. Great care is being taken over this matter and all possible speed will be made in ensuring that accurate answers are released to the women involved.

Government of Scotland

8. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for all-party talks on the future government and administration of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I intend to invite representatives of Opposition parties in Scotland to meet me in due course to

discuss the proposed changes in parliamentary procedure announced in the White Paper "Scotland in the Union: a Partnership for Good".

Mr. Taylor: As there is increasing concern about the lack of progress in resolving matters concerning the administration and government of Scotland, can the Secretary of State tell us even one reason why the Scottish Conservative party is opposed to round table talks with the other three main political parties in Scotland about Scotland's future?

Mr. Lang: The matter is being pursued not by the Scottish Conservative party but by Her Majesty's Government. We will pursue the matter in the way that I have described and will in due course lay before the House proposals on which I hope we shall have broad cross-party agreement.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets the other parties from Scotland, will he bear in mind that the comments during the passage of the Maastricht legislation make it clear that if the treaty comes into force and we are bound by it, with subsidiarity and the creation of, for example, the Committee of the Regions, it will lead to structures under which the United Kingdom will be broken up and it will be a vehicle for separatists? Will he also bear that in mind when considering the changes affecting Scotland?

Mr. Lang: Although of close interest to him, the matters to which my hon. Friend has referred are not part of the subject matter of the White Paper. I hope that he will agree that the best way of maintaining the United Kingdom is to maintain a united Government and a united Conservative party.

Mr. McAllion: If the Secretary of State says no to all-party talks on the establishment of a Scottish parliament, if he continues to say no to 61 of Scotland's 72 elected representatives who are demanding a Scottish parliament, and if he also says no to a referendum on the establishment of a Scottish parliament, how will he assess public opinion in Scotland on that critical issue? Will he talk to the trees or just to the dense undergrowth that sits beside him and behind him on the Government Benches? They do not represent Scottish opinion which remains overwhelmingly in favour of a return to Scottish democracy by the establishment of a directly elected Scottish parliament sitting in Edinburgh and not down here in England.

Mr. Lang: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman should think that he represents Scottish opinion on the matter. He does not even represent his own party on it; he represents the separatist wing of the Labour party. There are also in the Labour party devolutionists, federalists and, I am glad to say, a large number of unionists. The unity of the United Kingdom was the issue at the general election, and the verdict of the electorate was clear.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Since 82 per cent. of the Scots who live in Britain live in England, and since 90 per cent. of the Scots who live in the world do not live in Britain, is not all the nonsense about Scottish government irrelevant? If we are talking about Scottish assemblies, will my right hon. Friend remember that there used to be a kingdom of Fife, and may we be separated from the Scottish assembly? If I do not like that, may Fordell castle be separated from Fife?

Mr. Lang: As usual, my hon. and learned Friend has the capacity to ask the unanswerable. Let me assure him that the people of the United Kingdom and of Scotland gave their verdict at the general election last year. That was that they wanted to keep Britain united.

ScotRail (Strathclyde)

9. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Strathclyde regional council about the level of Government support for regional council financial aid to ScotRail services and maintenance programmes within Strathclyde region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received no representations about the level of Government support for regional council financial aid to ScotRail services and maintenance programmes within Strathclyde region.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Minister accept that Government cuts in financial support have affected the relationship between Strathclyde regional council and ScotRail, resulting in pressure on ScotRail to cut costs by reducing safety standards through the installation of single-lead junctions, particularly at Newton, the location of a crash which was caused by a single-lead junction? Will the Minister give a commitment that Government finance will be forthcoming to implement the removal of all single-lead junctions, not only in Strathclyde but throughout Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The matter has been discussed in the Standing Committee on the Railways Bill, and I understand that action is being taken. I will ensure that the hon. Member's representations are passed on. With regard to the financial settlement to the region, it is 5 per cent. more than in 1992-93, well ahead of current and projected rates of inflation. The overall resources available to Strathclyde regional council next year are expected to be at least at the level of the resources provisionally notified for last year. Of course, Strathclyde council has discretion to vire from one programme to another if it so wishes, but the settlement was generous. I will make sure that the specific point on safety is passed on.

Local Government Services

10. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when next he intends to meet COSLA to discuss local government services.

Mr. Stewart: I addressed the annual conference of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 26 March. My right hon. Friend and I will be meeting the convention later this year as part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters.

Mr. Maxton: If the Government insist on continuing with the unwanted and unnecessary reform of local government, does the Minister agree that all the existing services provided by local government should continue to be provided by a direct democratically elected local government? If so, does he believe that he should stop his

open and active campaigning for the retention of Eastwood district council as a single absurd unitary authority which made a nonsense of the consultation process on local government reform? Does he accept that the logic of his argument means that Eastwood should be part of a Greater Glasgow council that is democratically elected? Does he also agree that it would be obscenely unfair if his wealthy constituents in Giffnock and Whitecraigs should sponge off my poorer constituents in Castlemilk when they use the facilities provided by Glasgow?

Mr. Stewart: May I first wish the hon. Gentleman many happy returns on his birthday? I am sure that hon. Members will agree that he is wearing well. He will not be surprised to learn that I wholly disagree with him and deprecate his remarks, as do, for example, the Labour leadership in Strathkelvin district council. I suggest that he consults them on his plans for a Greater Glasgow. Objectively, one might look at what has happened, for example, to Roukenglen Park. Glasgow district council wanted to walk away from it, but it is now a major excellent asset for the whole community under Eastwood district council. That is a classic example of the success of Conservative local government policies in action.

Mr. Oppenheim: When my hon. Friend meets COSLA, will he discuss the employment practices of Scottish councils? While English Members find many Scottish customs both colourful and quaint, one that we find extremely strange is the practice of issuing green forms to general job applicants and pink forms to applicants who apply through councillors or who are relatives of councillors at Monklands council. Does that novel application of the share and share alike principle account for the fact that no fewer than 22 close relatives of councillors are employed at Monklands council?

Mr. Stewart: I think the figure may be higher than that. My hon. Friend has rightly highlighted matters of major concern to people in local government in Scotland. What is absolutely astonishing is that the shadow Secretary of State and the leader of the Labour party have remained silent on this matter for months, even though it directly affects their constituents at least one way or the other. They are capable of commenting on anything except this matter which affects their constituents.

Water and Sewerage Services

11. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the outcome of the consultation on the future of water and sewerage services; and if he will make a statement.

14. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make a statement on the future of water services in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend will make an announcement on the future of water and sewerage services in Scotland in due course.

Mr. Welsh: Is the Minister aware of the devastation caused by the disconnection of domestic water supplies to tens of thousands of individuals and families in England and Wales? If so, why did he say in a letter to me that the Government will consider such powers in Scotland? Will he give an absolute guarantee that there will be no disconnection of household water supplies and that this obscenity will never be visited on Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: I am really rather surprised that the hon. Gentleman should ask a question on water when he is quoted in *The Scotsman* as saying:

"sabotage could mean everything from turning a tap off to blowing a pipe right up . . . when we threaten, we will deliver."

I have never heard such arrogance from a Member of Parliament about civil disobedience on the issue of water supply. I made clear in an earlier answer the Government's exact position on water disconnection.

Mr. Worthington: Can the Minister name any people or organisations in Scotland who have written to him supporting water privatisation?

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, indeed, I could. If the hon. Gentleman goes to the Library he can wade through the list and see the number of people who have supported it. I accept that many more have been against privatisation, but all the Opposition Members jump to conclusions. They think that the horse called privatisation is past the post. The fact is that there are still eight or nine other runners in the starting stall. It will be up to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to decide later this summer which style we shall use to bring good quality water services to Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my hon. Friend agree that, rather than scaremongering with this emotive claptrap, the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) should address the main issue of how to fund £5 billion of capital expenditure on water services and sewage treatment during the next 10 to 15 years? Does he agree that the most important decision to be taken is how to fund that expenditure at the least possible cost to the taxpayer?

Sir Hector Monro: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not know why the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) cannot understand the difference between £2·5 billion and £5 billion. We have to accept that, whatever happens, water charges are steadily increasing and have increased dramatically in the past few years. It is the duty of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to provide the best service in the future and to provide the best quality water and sewerage in Scotland. That is what we will do and we shall announce how later this summer.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Will my hon. Friend confirm to the House that, whatever option Her Majesty's Government take up for the future of Scotland's water and sewerage, it will not be the option suggested by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh)—bomber Welsh—who advocated blowing up water pipes throughout Scotland?

Mr. Welsh: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. That is disgraceful.

Madam Speaker: Order. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I cannot take a point of order at this stage. I do not wish to take up time. However, we should watch the language that we use in the Chamber. Tolerant language at all times is the hallmark of good parliamentary debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and others will remember that.

Sir Hector Monro: I note what my hon. Friend has said. Anyone who looks at Library cuttings of what the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and the Scottish National party have said will know that what my hon. Friend says is true.

Mr. Welsh: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I will take the hon. Gentleman's point of order at the end of Question Time.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: On two occasions here today, the Minister has mentioned that privatisation is not necessarily the solution that the Government are looking for. May I put it on record that on two Saturdays in one part of my constituency alone—Dennistoun—6,000 people put their name to a petition saying that they did not want privatisation? That included three French visitors who visited Duke street. Even they said that they did not want it. So there is no one in Dennistoun who wants privatisation.

Sir Hector Monro: I would much rather drink the water in Dennistoun than the water anywhere in France. But I will certainly bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Boundary Reviews

12. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on boundary reviews for both Westminster and European elections in relation to Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under section 2(2) of the Boundary Commissions Act 1992, the Boundary Commission for Scotland has a statutory duty to complete its fourth general review of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland by 31 December 1994. The commission will undertake a review of European parliamentary constituency boundaries in Scotland immediately thereafter.

Mr. Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that one of the strengths of the Union is the equitable way in which it should treat all its citizens? On the basis that very large numbers of Scots have now migrated to their colony of England and are much involved in the government of that nation, why should those Scots be disfranchised because their vote is worth less in England than it is in Scotland? Will the Scottish Office please give instructions to the boundary commission that the next time the boundaries are reviewed it should work on the average constituency size for the whole of the United Kingdom?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The general answer to my hon. Friend is that the Scottish electoral quota takes account of Scotland's status as a small nation of large, sparsely populated and inaccessible areas. I have good news for him in one respect. Since 1918, the number of Scots constituencies has increased by one, which is less than 2 per cent., whereas since 1948 the number of English seats has increased by 18—3·4 per cent.—and in Wales by two—5·3 per cent. I suggest to my hon. Friend that the changes in population since 1918, when the present arrangements were set up, are broadly reflected in changes in representation in the House. In other words, if England's population is swelling, England may have a case for more Members of Parliament, but there is no need to alter the number of Scots.

Mr. Ernie Ross: More seriously, will the Minister ensure, first, that the Boundary Commission for Scotland has sufficient funds to carry out the important task on which it is presently engaged and, secondly, that a specific household survey is carried out by electoral registration officers throughout Scotland to ensure that the registers are up to date?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, I will make every effort to ensure that both the requests of the hon. Member are acted upon.

Committee of the Regions

13. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the details of Scottish representation on the Committee of the Regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Government are still considering the detailed arrangements for Scottish representation on the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Hogg: What is more important to the Secretary of State, his shabby deal with the Scottish National party or the representations that he has received from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities? Is he aware that yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) pressed the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to give the terms of the deal between the Government and the Scottish National party? This information was not forthcoming, either from the Minister or from the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) who on that occasion was making a feeble attempt to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party. Will the Secretary of State this afternoon tell us the terms of the agreement with the SNP and end once and for all speculation on this matter?

Mr. Lang: As regards the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I would certainly expect to be interested in its views about representation on the Committee of the Regions. As regards the deal with the Scottish National party, contents of deals of that kind are confidential and I do not regard it as my job to breach a confidence. What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that the Scottish National party failed to honour the deal that it offered the Government and therefore the Government regard themselves as under no obligation to it.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Norman Hogg: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The answer we have just had to my question is so important for Scottish Members that we must have clarification of it from the Government and from the SNP. —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot take a point of order at this stage. The hon. Gentleman is in any case not raising a point of order.

Water Charges

15. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will examine ways of reducing the level of water charges faced by island authorities.

Mr. Stewart: The setting of water charges in the islands is a matter for the islands councils. It would therefore be for the councils to examine ways of reducing the charges.

There is no statutory basis on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can intervene in the setting of charges.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Minister accept that the island authorities face a particular problem in that they must finance very expensive schemes on the basis of a relatively small population and that this leads to a huge disparity in the costs faced by island consumers compared with those on the mainland? Will he therefore undertake to look at this problem and try to find ways to reduce the disparity and to bring the water charges in the islands more into line with those on the mainland?

Mr. Stewart: The Western Isles has been allocated £3 million for water and sewerage for 1993-94. That allocation has more than doubled in four years. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Western Isles council qualifies for the top rate of grant of 75 per cent. for rural water supplies. In the past three years, around £600,000 has been paid to the Western Isles in respect of assistance for eligible schemes, and the council will continue to qualify under particular schemes.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Given that it was necessary to wait for the advent of privatisation to find the £85 million necessary to invest in a badly needed new sewerage treatment plant in my English constituency, will my hon. Friend join me in my enthusiasm that Scotland should benefit as soon as possible from the very many advantages to be gained from privatisation of the water industry?

Mr. Stewart: As my hon. Friend says, there are considerable advantages south of the border from water privatisation. My right hon. Friend will, of course, be considering all the representations he has received on this issue.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. An attempt was made by a Minister and a Conservative Back Bencher to attribute to me ideas which I have never propounded. I have made my views clear to the House and to yourself, Madam Speaker, and they are on record in *Hansard*. I cannot use the word "liar", but how else can I describe somebody who continues to promote an untruth?

May I suggest to the Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, that he tries to attribute those ideas to me directly outside of the House? I cannot make my views more clear. They are on record in *Hansard*, and I think that all hon. Members should read that record and note what I said.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Member knows, that is not a point of order for me. It is a question of dispute, which has now been dealt with.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had any request from a Minister to make a statement regarding the circumstances of Mr. Asil Nadir's departure from the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom? This is a matter of great importance for the ability of this country to prosecute serious City fraud, and I believe that a statement should be made by the relevant Government Minister. I see that the Foreign Secretary is in the Chamber and I wonder whether he would be able to say something on the Government's behalf.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the man in question as if he has already been found guilty. That he must not do. As to the hon. Gentleman's question, I have not been approached by any Minister wishing to make a statement on the issue.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If, as a result of the case of Mr. Asil Nadir, there should be any legislation before the House, will you give a ruling on whether any Conservative Member would be allowed to vote, in view of the very large number of donations which Mr. Nadir has given to the Conservative party, and which provides them with a direct pecuniary interest in his case?

Madam Speaker: Whenever there is any legislation before the House and individual Members have a financial interest, the hon. Gentleman knows that they must declare that interest.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) that I was going to raise with you the fact that last week a constituent of mine received from him a letter begging for funds on behalf of the Danish "no" campaign, which he argued was going bust. My constituent was offered the additional incentive that, if she donated £50, she would be sent, free, a copy of one of his books on Europe, worth £14. My constituent wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston only last November in favour of the Maastricht treaty, not against, and received this letter——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not argue the case but come to the point of order for me.

Dr. Hampson: My point of order is that this letter was part of a large-scale operation asking for funds on behalf of the Danes and it was sent on House of Commons notepaper in a pre-paid House of Commons envelope. My hon. Friend is one of those who is among the first to decry wasteful use of taxpayers' money on European ventures and my constituent would like your assistance, Madam Speaker, in getting back some of our money.

Several hon. Members *rose——*

Madam Speaker: Order. I note that the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) is rising to put a point of order. I shall hear him before responding.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for having been given notice that the matter would be raised, but unfortunately that notice arrived only a short time ago, and I have yet to see the Leeds letter in question. But I have received a huge amount of correspondence from the public about my views on Maastricht and about how I have voted.

I have sought to reply to all of them, but, because there have been so many, I have had to respond by means of a standard letter—*[Interruption.]* I have in my pocket a copy of that standard letter. Almost all the letters—in fact, I think all of them without exception—sought my advice about what people could do about the Maastricht Bill——

Madam Speaker: Order. I now understand the point of order. I must tell the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that I cannot guarantee that his constituents will get their money refunded. Indeed, contents of letters are not a matter for me. But the use of House of Commons stationery for such an appeal is a matter for the Administration Committee, and I have already referred it to the Serjeant at Arms. I shall hear no further points of order on that matter. I have now dealt with it.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise with you a matter relating to the rights of the House consequent on three ministerial answers that I received. While the content of the answers is not a matter for you, their effects on the rights of the House is, which is why I make this submission to you.

I put down three questions to the Secretary of State for Social Services relating to the cost to the Exchequer of certain payments and expenditure of the Benefits Agency. One related to the Benefits Agency funding examinations by private well person clinics for all staff aged over 35. Another was about the cost to the Exchequer of the Benefits Agency requiring staff during the past 18 months to work

"at time and a half and double time, plus travelling expenses, for the purpose of making up the backlog of disability living allowance cases."

The third was about the cost to the Exchequer of the activity of the Benefits Agency in providing its staff with corporate clothing, whatever that might be.

I received a response to the first question from the junior Minister at the Department which, while not a full

reply, provided me with the information that I requested, which was the cost to the Exchequer, which was £2·1 million.

In relation to the other two questions, which were in precisely the same form, the Minister of State in one case and the junior Minister in the other refused to give me that information and said instead that it was a matter for the notorious and ineffable Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, who would be writing to me.

Two matters arise, Madam Speaker, one more important than the other. The first is why, in relation to three questions put in identical form, the information is provided in response to one but refused in response to the other two.

The second is that this House votes supply. The Exchequer, through the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other Ministers, is responsible to the House, and only Ministers have the duty and responsibility of explaining to the House how supply is spent through the Exchequer. Yet in this case they have decided to ask an over-paid errand boy, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, to reply on a matter which is the responsibility of the House and on which it is the duty of a Minister to reply to the House.

Therefore, I ask you, Madam Speaker, to advise me on how we can prevent the Government from delegating ministerial responsibility to the House to a person who is not responsible to the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I must make it clear to him—I hope once and for all, as I have dealt with such matters before on his behalf—that I have no responsibility for ministerial answers or for refusals to answer. The right hon. Gentleman raised the general issue in an Adjournment debate, and if he wishes to take the matter further or make further submissions he may care to contact the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, which has taken an interest in the status of agencies. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that it is not a matter for me.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As I understand it, all citizens are or should be equal before the law and no one should be in a privileged position because he has donated to the party in office—even if he has donated £440,000.

In view of the considerable public disquiet over what has happened, what steps can hon. Members take to obtain a statement from the Government on the disappearance of Mr. Asil Nadir, who was facing serious charges? Apparently, his passport had been taken away and he was due to report daily to a police station—he has simply disappeared. A lot of money is owing to his creditors—some of it was donated to the Tory party without being put on the company accounts.

In view of the public disquiet, what can be done to obtain a statement from the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary on that individual and how he has fled the country?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman, who has been a Member of Parliament for a long time, knows that I do not give procedural advice across the Floor of the House. He knows the ways of the House and does not have to seek information from the Chair on how to proceed in order to obtain the information that he wants.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry that I was not able to give notice of my point of order, but it was prompted by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and is a general point of order.

It relates to your previous references to the misuse of parliamentary notepaper and official stamped envelopes. You may remember when, in December, I raised an issue involving my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). I am sorry to raise the matter again, but surely the crucial issue is not that the stationery was used to reply to letters, but that unsolicited letters were sent to people whose names and addresses—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I have seen the letter and satisfied myself as to what it is all about.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I think that somebody should try to give you some assistance on this, Madam Speaker——

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman has a point of order, I am willing to hear it, but I need little assistance from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Skinner: During the past 10 minutes, blood has been flying across from Tory Benches as Tory Members have been fighting like Kilkenny cats. I want to know whether you will give permission to the Services Committee or whoever to make a splash apron to place across the front of the Opposition Benches to keep the blood away.

Madam Speaker: No, but I shall give authority for the hon. Gentleman to have a bullet-proof vest if he wishes.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to Scottish Question Time, when four out of five Tory Back Benchers each asked two questions? I have been patiently waiting as I am 34th on the list and have a question to ask about a health issue. Could you be more fair in your asking of questions to all those involved?

Hon. Members: Oh.

Madam Speaker: I very much resent the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and I seek an apology from him right now.

Mr. Clarke: I did not mean, Madam Speaker, that you were being unfair—I apologise for that. I am just voicing —not very well—the anger and frustration from which we suffer because of people stealing time from us.

Madam Speaker: I think that what the hon. Gentleman suffers from is a great bout of frustration, but he knows as well as the House knows that I deal very fairly with all questions, including Scottish questions. If he has any further complaints, I seriously suggest that he put down a substantive motion. I doubt that he will do that; if he looks at the record, I think that he will shy away from doing so.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, arising out of Scottish questions this afternoon. For some time, from early March onwards, Opposition Members have been endeavouring to secure information about the terms of the agreement reached between Her Majesty's Government and the

parliamentary leader of the Scottish National party. The Government have steadfastly refused to provide that information; this afternoon we were told that it was confidential. I understand that point, although I do not go along with it, because I believe in open government.

The Secretary of State then said that the Scottish National party had failed to honour the terms of the agreement reached, and that, in the circumstances, no such agreement now existed. I hope that I understand the position correctly. If I do, I feel that the matter ought to be pursued, because the SNP has written to all its councillors in Scotland, and there has been a great deal of press briefing. It is clear that, yet again, the Scottish people have been misled, and I hope to raise this matter on the Adjournment.

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for me. It is more a matter of the hon. Gentleman seeking to extend Scottish Question Time.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As the fifth Member of the five referred to by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), and despite having bounced up and down like a peerie during Scottish Question Time, am I to suppose that there is something wrong with me, since I have not been called a second time?

Madam Speaker: The House appears to be in very good spirits this afternoon.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. As Ministers are clearly most reluctant to make a statement about Mr. Nadir, would it be in order to table questions to the Home Secretary asking what bail conditions applied, whether his passport was held by the police, and most particularly whether Group 4 was involved in this fiasco?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is again asking for procedural advice. He knows how to proceed.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Leaving aside the neurosis—indeed, the paranoia—of the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) who, as a former Whip, well knows that many discussions and negotiations take place in this House, will you, Madam Speaker, accept that the Scottish National party has always been very open about its discussions on the Committee of the Regions and the Maastricht treaty, and on how we view our future in Europe?

Would you therefore agree that, when a Privy Councillor gives his word that negotiatons are worth pursuing and worth fulfilling but that is not subsequently followed through, it must be a matter of resignation for the Privy Councillor concerned?

Madam Speaker: I think that that is a matter for the Privy Councillor himself to determine.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As to the Asil Nadir case, for those of us who know something about the history of Cyprus—that is to say, not many Members of this House—*[Interruption.]* You are all bloody ignorant about it.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not let his audience detract from his point of order to me.

Mr. Faulds: I am an old man, and I occasionally get impatient at the stupidity of my colleagues on both sides of the House.

Is it not a fact that, if the British Government had taken appropriate action when Archbishop Makarios aborted the constitution—*[Interruption.]* try to learn—of the Republic of Cyprus in 1963, and if the British Government had had the guts to take any action in 1974, when there was an attempted coup in southern Cyprus, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus should be recognised, and there would be no problem about the return of Asil Nadir?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for a long time. He knows that that is not a point of order for me, but a political comment. We must now proceed.

Landlord and Tenant (Covenants)

3.51 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to privity of contract and estate in respect of covenants in tenancies; to give effect to the recommendations of the Law Commission in that regard; and for connected purposes.

The Bill was drafted by the Law Commission—which exists to advise the Government and the House on changes in the law—in report 174, and was published in 1988 under the title "Landlord and Tenant Privity of Contract and Estate". It has the support of a large number of property lawyers and of hon. Members on both sides of the House. It will remove a dangerous catch in the law. I know that the Lord Chancellor has promised to legislate along the lines of the Law Commission's report, but only for leases granted after the date of the enactment of any measure that he introduces. That is a wholly inadequate response to a problem that afflicts many business tenants here and now.

The problem that the Bill addresses was considered carefully by the Law Commission. The easiest way to describe the Bill is by illustrating the problem. At the moment, in law, original tenants and landlords are contractually liable, under the terms of the lease, no matter how long after they have ceased to have any interest in the property to which the lease relates. In the words of Michael Caine, "Not a lot of people know that." However, it is a fact, and it has caused some suffering to some business tenants.

Let me give an illustration. Let us suppose that a landlord grants a 21-year lease on a shop or a factory to a tenant. After three years of the lease, perhaps because that original tenant is making a success of the business, he transfers the lease to a second tenant. The second tenant then transfers the lease to a third tenant, the third to a fourth and so on down a chain of transfers.

Let us assume that, after the lease has run for 19 of the 21 years, in the 19th year the tenant then in possession of the premises defaults on payment of rent or fails to carry out essential repairs to the premises. The law is that the original tenant, who took the property on 19 years ago but gave it up 16 years ago, is liable for the default and has to deal with the repairs. The problem may be even worse with the rent, because if the 21-year lease has rent revision clauses, the original tenant may be liable to pay a rent perhaps five or even 10 times the original rent that he signed up for. Recently, landlords—mostly institutional landlords—have begun to spring that trap on unsuspecting original tenants.

The liability of the original tenant is not a fanciful notion. It is a disabling, even a bankrupting, event for the original tenant, and it has been particularly marked during the recession. After all, in London alone last year, over 40,000 businesses became insolvent or at least went out of business, based on the figures for VAT terminations. Therefore, many thousands of original lessees could find themselves liable as a result of subsequent tenants defaulting. For many original tenants, the original lessee liability leases represent a timebomb ticking away underneath them, although they have no control or influence over what happens with the later tenants. As I have explained, it could be even worse as there may have been later rent reviews.

I shall give two recent dramatic examples. When the IRA bomb exploded in Bishopsgate, causing millions of pounds of damage to premises—some of which may not have been insured because of the changes in the insurance market—the original tenant of one of those premises could be liable for millions of pounds' worth of damage, long after he had parted with the lease.

The second example is Canary Wharf. If its developers had done a lease swop—had taken over the lease of premises in the City of London in order to persuade that leaseholder to take a lease at Canary Wharf—when those developers then failed, the business tenant could find himself holding a lease at Canary Wharf and having to pay rent there, and also liable as the original lessee for the rent on the premises in the City of London.

The central feature of my Bill would be to release the original tenant once he or she had transferred the lease, but subject to some safeguards for the landlord in the first transfer by the original lessee—if it were reasonable to provide safeguards in the particular circumstances. That is one of the recommendations of the Law Commission. The Bill would also provide for the original landlord to be released from his obligations under certain circumstances.

A few people—I suspect, very few—might say that the Bill is unfair to landlords. However, the truth is that the institutional landlord, as it usually is, that enforces the original lessee liability is able to spread his risk. The unfortunate original tenant cannot, except in a very few circumstances, spread the risk.

That is why the law should be changed, and that is why the Law Commission has taken the same view. It is essential that we legislate for that now and that it should apply to current leases. The Lord Chancellor's proposals to direct legislation only at future leases are inadequate.

The Bill will prevent a massive injustice—the falling upon original tenants of wholly unexpected but unavoidable losses. Business people may have moved out of their premises long ago because of their success, or perhaps because of retirement. Indeed, there are many instances of retired people being caught under the present law.

The Bill has the support not only of both sides of the House, but of chambers of commerce and many retail associations. Indeed, the recession underlines the need for the Bill. It will correct an ancient but commercially dangerous feature of the law and I ask the House to give me leave to present it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Fraser, Mr. John Morris, Mr. Keith Vaz, Mr. Keith Hill, Mr. Malcolm Wicks, Mr. Jim Dowd, Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Nigel Evans, Mr. David Nicholson, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. Simon Hughes and Mr. Chris Mullin.

LANDLORD AND TENANT (COVENANTS)

Mr. John Fraser accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to privity of contract and estate in respect of covenants in tenancies; to give effect to the recommendations of the Law Commission in that regard; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 May, and to be printed. [Bill 190.]

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 1

TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION

3.58pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 18, after 'Community', insert—

'with the exception of the Protocol on Social Policy on page 117 of Cm 1934'.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to discuss amendment No. 26, in page 1, line 18, after 'Community', insert—

', with the exception of the Protocol on Social Policy'.

Dr. Cunningham: The amendment stands in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition; the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats; the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), the parliamentary leader of the SNP; the right hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), the leader of the SDLP; the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. I. Paisley), the leader of the DUP; and myself. It is supported by a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I begin by saying that, already, one important victory has been achieved for the House of Commons—after a long struggle to have a vote on the issue at all. In pursuing that objective, we have had very much in mind the need to uphold the rights of the House of Commons itself and the rights of Opposition parties represented here.

As it stands, the Bill keeps the United Kingdom outside the scope of the protocol on social policy, so excluding the United Kingdom from the social chapter. It prevents the people of the United Kingdom from being part of the full social dimension of the EC.

The Bill excludes Britain from provisions, which our 11 partners have agreed, to facilitate greater protection for employed people in their working conditions, better rights of consultation and information, equality of treatment and opportunity for men and women and the integration into the labour force of people who have been long-term unemployed, including people with disabilities.

Those benefits will flow to the citizens of the 11 other members of the Community, but will be denied to the people of our country by the actions of Her Majesty's Government. We deplore that denial of the legitimate rights of the people of our country. Those rights will be readily available to other citizens of the Community, and we have always held that they should be available to the people of Britain too.

The opt-out that the Government negotiated was to do not so much with the rights or wrongs of the provisions of the social chapter as with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary trying to buy off opposition in their own party by throwing some kind of sop to their opponents over the Maastricht treaty ratification process—a trick which has signally failed to deliver the goods.

The Government have been consistent in their inconsistency on the matter. First, they said that the provisions of the social chapter would be damaging to the interests of Britain and the British economy, but they failed to produce a single shred of evidence to substantiate that.

Then we had a long series of statements over many months by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who I note is not in his place today. I think that we can assume that the field marshal is here to try to organise an orderly retreat from everything that the Government have said hitherto about the consequences of amendment No. 2, formerly Committee stage amendment No. 27.

But it is worth reminding the House what the right hon. Member for Watford has said. For example, on 20 January he said that, if the Labour party pressed amendment No. 27 to a Division, we should be aware that,

"under the terms of the amendment, United Kingdom law would not conform to the treaty's provisions, so it would be impossible for the United Kingdom to ratify the treaty".

On the same day, he went on to ask whether I could explain the Opposition's objectives if the United Kingdom was not in a position to ratify the treaty as a result of the amendment. Our objectives have always been clear and consistent—to secure the real benefits of the provisions of the social chapter in the interests of the people of our country.

The right hon. Member for Watford was nothing if not persistent on that occasion. He went on:

"the question remains, and the hon. Gentleman must answer it"—

that was me—

"does the amendment place the British Government in the position of being a non-ratificant?"—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 403-4.]

"Non-ratificant" is an odd word, but it is an odd argument—one that we have never believed.

At least there was some consistency between our side of the argument and the position adopted by the Foreign Secretary, who said in a statement:

"The House will recall that the protocol on social policy authorises the other 11 member states of the Community to have recourse to the institutions, procedures and mechanisms of the treaty of Rome for the purposes of implementing their agreement on co-operation in the social area—the so-called social chapter. Most significantly, it specifies that acts adopted by the Council under the terms of the protocol shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 27.]

For us, that is what the argument has always been about.

On that occasion, the Foreign Secretary said that all the previous advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—based on the consistent legal opinion of his advisers during many months and enunciated on many occasions in this House and elsewhere by his right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford—had suddenly been found to be completely wrong.

He said that, for many months, during the Maastricht treaty negotiations and subsequent discussions about the significance of the social chapter and the Government's opt-out, he and his colleagues had been misled by their legal advisers. That was, and remains, a singularly unconvincing argument.

In their various manoeuvrings and meanderings during this long labyrinth of debate about the significance of our

amendment, the Government have shown a unique facility to be able to stick their heads in the sand but still come up with egg on their faces.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Although I concede that it is not precisely within the same framework, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the argument for pressing the amendment is displaced by the existence of clause 5 of the Bill, which was voted on as new clauses 74 and 75?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I do not agree. Throughout arguments over the statements and decisions of the Chairman of Ways and Means about the admissibility of a vote on the issue, I have always maintained that amendment No. 2—amendment No. 27 in Committee—and new clauses 74 and 75 had specific, discrete and different purposes, and different implications for the legislation. That was my position, and it remains so. Whatever else the hon. Gentleman may say, we have been completely consistent about that throughout the debate and I maintain that position today.

The Foreign Secretary went on to advise the Committee that it did not really matter whether amendment No. 2 was carried. Speaking on the advice of his right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, he said that it would have no consequence. We did not accept that belated, eleventh-hour and extremely partial analysis of the consequences of amendment No. 27 on 15 February, and nor do we accept those arguments today.

The Government—in the form of the Foreign Secretary—then went on to say that, even though the amendment was of no significance, it did not matter, as it should be defeated anyway. His phrase was that it should be defeated for the sake of "completeness and clarity."

Whatever the right hon. Gentleman can claim for the Government's position during this long drawn-out argument, it is not clarity. Even now, as the debate on amendment No. 2 commences, there is no clarity about the Government's intentions. Perhaps the Foreign Secretary would like to rise to tell the House the exact significance of his presence.

One way or the other, the Government are bound to lose. If—in the words of the *Daily Mail*, which is not generally known as a supporter of the Labour party—the Government do not know whether to run or to stand and fight, that tells us something about the confusion that continues to reign.

If the Foreign Secretary proposes that the House should accept the amendment now, after all the weeks of deliberation, obfuscation, prevarication and delay, the obvious question for us to ask—and, surely, for those outside to ask—is "What has it all been about?" Why did not the Government agree to accept the amendment in the first place? Not only would that have saved the House and the Chair a good deal of unnecessary anguish and difficulty; it would have saved perhaps thousands of metres of column inches in the national newspapers and other publications which have been picking over the entrails in an attempt to establish the Government's objectives.

Our objectives, in contrast, are consistent, and benefit from the clarity to which the Foreign Secretary referred.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): The right hon. Gentleman asked the Government for clarity. Will he clarify what he seeks to achieve? It is clear that amendment No. 2 will not reinstate the social chapter in the treaty; what, then, is its object?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. He made an almost identical intervention when I spoke in a similar debate on 20 January. He clearly has not changed his view; I have not changed mine either. As I said on 20 January, and have said several times today, the object of the amendment is to secure the benefits of the social chapter in the interests of the people of Britain.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): How will the amendment do that? Its wording does not even purport to do that.

Dr. Cunningham: On 20 January, I said—ah, I see that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office has entered the Chamber. The debate is no longer "Hamlet" without the prince.

On 20 January, I said that the amendment would confront the Government with a dilemma. Either they would have to renegotiate with our 11 Community partners to fold into the treaty the benefits of the social chapter for Britain, or they would have to resolve the problem in some other way. Now, friends of the Foreign Secretary are saying that, if the amendment is carried, they will use the opportunity to take action in the courts—perhaps to seek judicial review. I do not know—that is a matter for them.

We also believe that the amendment will give employees and trade unions, singularly or in groups, an opportunity to take their cases to the European Court to ensure that the benefits of the social chapter apply to them in exactly the same way as they will undoubtedly apply to employees of their own companies operating in other Community member states. I know what the Foreign Secretary will say: he will say that none of that will result from the amendment.

Mr. Hurd: It is not in the amendment.

Dr. Cunningham: I am talking about the amendment's consequences. Here is another attempt at obfuscation; already, the right hon. Gentleman is starting to dissemble yet again. I have no doubt that he will repeat what he said on 15 February, on the advice of the Attorney-General. Let me reiterate that that interpretation is not widely shared—not only in the House, but among legal experts elsewhere in the Community, let alone elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

As I have made clear, we will pursue our amendment. We shall ask the House to support it, unless, as I suspect—the Foreign Secretary has already refused the opportunity to make the Government's intentions clear to the House at the outset—the right hon. Gentleman now tells us that the Government are going to accept it after all.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am a genuine seeker after truth. On four occasions the right hon. Gentleman has talked about the benefits of the social protocol. Can he tell the House what the social protocol will provide that is not in articles 118A and 118B of the Single European Act, articles which he will know well?

4.15 pm

Dr. Cunningham: At the beginning of the debate, I took, the precaution of reading out what we thought the general benefits of the social chapter provisions would be, but I guess either that the hon. Gentleman was not here at the time or that he was not listening very carefully. I have another observation to make on his intervention. If he is a genuine seeker after truth, I put it to him that he joined the wrong political party to attain that objective.

The reasons that the Attorney-General and the Foreign Secretary have in mind have nothing to do with neatness and tidiness. They involve something more substantial, I would argue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has argued in the past.

The Attorney-General and the Foreign Secretary still appear to be terrified of the consequences of amendment No. 27, and seek to play down its implications by saying that it will have no effect at all. The reality, however, is that they have manoeuvred over a long period to try to prevent the House from coming to a decision on the matter.

The Attorney-General and the Foreign Secretary were relieved each time that the amendment temporarily seemed to disappear from the agenda of the business of the House but, thanks to our persistence and the correct ruling in the interests of the House of Commons that you eventually gave, Madam Speaker, we have that opportunity today.

The Attorney-General's view—produced, as I said, quite unexpectedly—had all the hallmarks of a desperate attempt to get the Government off the hook on the issue. It is astonishing—many people share this view—that the Government, having gone through the negotiations on the Maastricht treaty and having seen the amendment on the Amendment Paper for many months—from the spring of last year—should have consistently advanced one view and then, when it became apparent that they faced defeat, should have got the Attorney-General to pop up, like a rabbit out of a hat, and say something else. The Government did not even have the grace to say that the Foreign Secretary had been wrong. They just said that they had come to a different conclusion.

I put it to Ministers and to those who sit on the Conservative Benches that that kind of procedure and action has no credibility at all, not only in this House but with people outside. Little is more calculated to bring the workings of Government into disrepute than that kind of behaviour over discussions and decisions in the House of Commons. It is our belief—that is why we have persisted with amendment No. 27, and we are confident about it—that the consequences of its inclusion in the Bill will be to the eventual benefit of the people of Britain.

The Foreign Secretary asks why we persist with it. If he believes—I am not sure what in his heart of hearts he really believes in any longer—that the amendment is likely to end in the possibility of long, complicated and expensive litigation, there is a simple answer: accept the provisions of the social chapter now and stop this reactionary isolation, thus preventing our citizens from having the advantages that everyone—except the Conservative party and, as I said on 20 January, the neo-fascist party of France—believes will flow from it.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many Conservative Members feel that the social chapter is a mistake not just for this country but for much of the rest of Europe, given the fading competitiveness of Europe vis-a-vis the United States, Japan and the far east? Does he not agree that, if we are to protect our citizens and work forces and ensure that they have jobs in future, we need to be extremely careful about introducing high-cost employment laws?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not believe that, and neither does any other democratic party of any political persuasion in any member country of the European Community. The German Christian Democrats do not believe it; the Free Democrats do not believe it; and nor does any political party in any of the countries that are applicants for membership of the European Community.

As I said, the only other political party that shares that view is that led by Mr. Jean-Marie Le Pen. I doubt whether even the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) is comfortable in his company. I might add that, if she is successful in her quest for a seat in the European Parliament—a subject on which there is also some doubt in my mind—she will not find that any of the parties represented there share her view.

The view taken by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South is reminiscent of the isolation of the Conservative party over another issue—the poll tax. We all remember how, in the face of all the evidence, of all rational argument and of all sensible debate, the Conservative party alone ploughed on into the quagmire of the poll tax, with all that that meant and with all the damage it caused, not only to individuals but to the formidable and worthwhile institution of democratic local government. I do not know how Conservative Members can take comfort in their isolation—their unique position of obstinacy. Their views are completely their own and are not supported anywhere else.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Given that the Labour party has changed its mind so many times in recent years, is it not possible that parties in other parts of Europe will eventually see the light and join the Conservative party in taking a realistic approach?

Dr. Cunningham: The light coming from the Conservative party to which the hon. Gentleman refers is little more than one-candle power. In reality, the concentrated beams of searchlights across the rest of Europe are all focused on one issue—the need for a developing European Community to be more than just a market economy and to have a social dimension.

That is what the argument has always been about. That remains our argument. That is why we have persisted. I believe that we have done parliamentary democracy a service by making sure that we all had an opportunity to vote on the issue and that we are right, too, on the merits of the argument.

I suspect that the Foreign Secretary will say that the Government propose to accept the amendment. In that case, he will have little credibility, but it seems that this Government will do anything rather than have to face a defeat in the Division Lobbies on this issue.

Mr. Hurd: It is not very long since we discussed the substance of this matter; it seems to be a situation comedy that runs and runs, episode by episode. I noted today that it still has its addicts among the press, but I am not sure that its popular ratings are as great as all that. Only about

a fortnight ago, I debated with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) the substance of the question, and I shall not do so again, except in the briefest summary.

Most of my right hon. and hon. Friends believe that one of the biggest challenges facing the European economy is declining competitiveness. Unemployment is the biggest source of poverty in this country today. If we are uncompetitive, we create unemployment. From the figures that were given in the debate on 22 April, there can be no doubt that European competitiveness is declining. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was right in saying that that is one of the main problems.

If that is so, the true question for those interested in the social dimension of the single market is not how to ensure, through a social chapter, precisely the same levels of social provision in each member state, but how Europe can effectively compete in the world. Competitiveness is the key to generating the necessary wealth to provide the social safety net. The social provisions of any treaty cannot by themselves generate that. That is a brief summary of the substantive argument against the social chapter which led my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to insist on the opt-out.

The debate is not a new one in the House. We have debated the issue time and again over almost a year and a half. In that time, the House has rejected on three separate occasions Opposition motions or amendments calling for the incorporation of the social agreement into the treaty. So the House of Commons is repeatedly on record on that point. In the pre-Maastricht debate on 20 and 21 November 1991, a Labour amendment, which called for, among other things, the inclusion of the social agreement in the treaty of Rome, was defeated by 191 votes. [HON. MEMBERS: "That was in the previous Parliament."] I shall come to this Parliament in a moment.

In the debate on 18 and 19 December 1991, immediately after Maastricht, the Liberals tabled an amendment deploring the social opt-out. It was defeated by a majority of 364. On Second Reading of the Bill, on 20 and 21 May 1992—in this Parliament—Labour moved that the Bill not be read a Second time, partly because of the opt-out on the social chapter. That amendment was defeated by 99 votes. There is no doubt about the judgment of the previous Parliament and of this Parliament on the question whether the treaty should or should not include the social chapter.

Nevertheless, we recognised that the House wanted yet another chance to vote on the principle. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) pressed that, as did other hon. Members, and we accepted new clause 74, now clause 5 of the amended Bill. That will allow a further debate and a vote after the Bill has received Royal Assent, when the opt-out can be considered on its merits. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is just.

What is clearly not possible, despite the arguments of the right hon. Member for Copeland, is to discuss the substance on the basis of the amendment that we are debating. It does not provide for consideration of the opt-out on its merits. What we see as a result of the manoeuvring—this is the heart of the matter—not by the Government but by the Opposition, as has been spotted by the more perceptive commentators, is two different groups in the House engaged in procedural manoeuvres which are incompatible.

The two camps who favour the amendment do so for entirely different and contradictory reasons. First, there are those who are opposed to the social chapter but even more opposed to the treaty of Maastricht itself; they sit on the Conservative Benches. We know that they are opposed to the social chapter. I have here the record of the Divisions in which they expressed that opposition. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who intervened just now, has a stalwart record of voting against the social chapter. My hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—I simply draw attention to two hon. Members who are immediately prominent in the debate—have a stalwart record, such as one would expect from Conservative Members, of opposing the social chapter. They are clear about that. The only thing that is clearer is that they dislike the treaty of Maastricht even more, and they will lose no opportunity to prevent it from being ratified.

4.30 pm

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) talked about the benefits of the social chapter—my right hon. Friend is talking about the dangers of the social chapter. Before my right hon. Friend goes much further, will he go into the details of the protocol and tell us precisely what the Government are frightened of that is not contained in articles 118a and 118b of the Single European Act?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) pressed me on that point during the debate on new clause 74. I do not have the list of examples that I gave him. If my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North wishes to refresh his memory, he will find the answer to his question in *Hansard*.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North voted five times in debates, in one way or another rejecting the social chapter. Obviously, after his research into the matter he concluded that the social chapter was deeply undesirable. A group of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, dislike the social chapter. They dislike the treaty even more and will swallow their scruples about the social chapter because they believe that they can prevent the treaty from being ratified by voting for this amendment. That is completely in contradiction to the larger group of Labour Members who favour the social chapter and claim to support the Maastricht treaty.

We have one group of hon. Members who want the treaty—*[Interruption.]* I cannot be entirely exhaustive in my catalogue of the eccentricities of opinion in the House. But, broadly speaking, one group wants the treaty and the social chapter and another group wants neither the treaty nor the social chapter. Extraordinarily, both groups—this is the curious feature of amendment No. 2—seem to think that the amendment serves their contrary purposes. Both groups cannot be right. In fact, both are wrong, and I shall explain why we believe that to be so.

Some Conservative Members want, above all, to prevent ratification, despite their Conservative analysis and rejection of the social chapter. I explained to the House in some detail in a statement on 15 February, to which the right hon. Member for Copeland genially referred, why the present amendment—amendment No. 2 is virtually the same as amendment No. 27—would not prevent ratification—*[Interruption.]* I was in sackcloth

[Mr. Hurd]

and ashes on that occasion and I do not intend to put them on again. I can recap the argument and the advice I received from my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General which I gave to the House on that occasion, and which he repeated in the House a week later. Clearly, I must do so.

Amendment No. 27 is the same as amendment No. 2 in that it would exclude from the scope of clause 1(1) of the Bill—that is, from incorporation in domestic law under the European Communities Act—the protocol on social policy. That is all that it would do. The amendment would not have any effect on the treaty or its protocols. Therefore, the legal question must be: can Britain ratify the treaty even if the protocol on social policy were not incorporated in domestic law? Earlier this year, the Law Officers advised—as the House was told on 15 February—that if the amendment were carried, Acts adopted under the protocol would still not apply to the United Kingdom. It follows that no rights and obligations arise from those Acts which need to be given effect in our domestic law.

While incorporation of the protocol in domestic law is desirable, it is not necessary for ratification or for implementation of the Maastricht treaty. That is what I explained to the House on 15 February. There is no change of position. That is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General explained to the House on 22 February. That is the view and the analysis to which we hold today.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Foreign Secretary explain why he takes the view that the provision on the social chapter does not require to be ratified in accordance with the procedures of Parliament set out in the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, sections 6(1) and 6(2) of which require any measures flowing from an agreement of European Community countries which affect the powers of the European Parliament to be approved by Parliament? It seems to me that that makes it a necessity for the House to approve the social chapter. If the amendment is not passed, that cannot happen.

Mr. Hurd: That point has been raised by Liberal Democrat Members previously and there has been correspondence about it. But I am advised that clause 1(2) of the Bill specifically deals with and covers that point. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's point does not contradict the analysis that I have been given. The point has been covered previously and the hon. Gentleman has returned to it.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will my right hon. Friend explain something which puzzles a great many laymen such as myself and has done so for many months? If the social protocol is apparently so unimportant, why was the opt-out described as the main achievement of the Maastricht negotiation when my right hon. Friend returned from Maastricht?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is, indeed—I do not blame him for this, because I have wandered through these tracks myself—showing himself to be a layman. The opt-out is in the treaty. The protocol is attached to the treaty. The protocol is part of the treaty. Its status in the treaty is not affected by the amendment. I am seeking to show, following the advice from my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, that the effect of the amendment is simply on the question whether the opt-out protocol should be embodied in domestic law. Its status in the treaty and its value as an opt-out are not affected by the amendment, because the opt-out remains in the treaty.

Dr. John Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: I shall come to the right hon. Gentleman's point in a moment.

The effect of the amendment—here I repeat the answer that I have just given to my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell)—would be to remove the social protocol from those parts of the treaty to be incorporated into domestic law. However, as no obligations on the United Kingdom which require incorporation under the 1972 Act arise from the social protocol, the amendment would not prevent ratification.

The question of administrative costs has been raised by several of my hon. Friends. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has already advised how that obligation, if it ever arose, could be discharged. So those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who believe that passing the amendment would prevent ratification of the treaty are, in our judgment and according to our legal advice, incorrect.

Then there is the other, completely opposite, contrary and contradictory group who support the amendment. It is a larger group and is on the Opposition Benches. It accepts that the amendment will not prevent ratification of the treaty, but argues that it will force Britain to accept the agreement annexed to the protocol on social policy. We tried in a gentle way to press the right hon. Member for Copeland on that point during his speech. He moved sharply from the supposition that the amendment would have the effect that he described to some other vague talk about the consequences that would flow from it.

We are all experts on consequences that might flow from this or that, but that is not the same as saying that a vote for the amendment is a vote to bring Britain into the social chapter. The amendment does not have that effect either. It cannot do so because it is the treaty—I repeat the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey—which contains Britain's opt-out from the social agreement. The treaty cannot be amended by our debates on the Bill.

It will be for the House, at the end of all these exhaustive discussions, to decide on Third Reading whether to pass the Bill and thus enable the Government to ratify the treaty when the Bill comes into force. That is a decision for this Parliament. It will relate to the whole Maastricht package—that is to say, to the treaty including the protocols. The treaty is not a package—there are other matters that the House has debated and on which it has voted against the Government, which relate not to the treaty but to peripheral matters—but the treaty is not a package from which one can pick and choose. The House must and will soon decide whether it wishes to proceed with the legislation that makes ratification possible.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): My right hon. Friend has said that some Conservative Members do not want the Maastricht treaty or the social chapter. He has explained how a vote for this amendment will not necessarily damage the treaty. Will he confirm the

statement that he made in one of our earlier debates, that a vote for this amendment will not in any way be a vote for bringing the social chapter to this country?

Mr. Hurd: That is a point which I am now developing. The Opposition Front-Bench Members are wrong and my hon. Friend is right: it does not have that effect. It simply concerns whether the protocol which allows 11 other countries to proceed down this path should be incorporated into domestic law.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: No, if I may proceed.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Robertson: The Secretary of State has said on a number of occasions, and again today, that amendment No. 27 and now amendment No. 2 are undesirable, but he will not tell the House why they are undesirable. Previously, he said that he wanted to defeat amendment No. 27 for the sake of completeness and clarity. If the passing of amendment No. 27 is undesirable and will leave the Bill unclear and imprecise, will the Secretary of State tell the House the consequences of that? He consistently refuses to do so.

Mr. Hurd: Because I have not reached that part of my speech. I am trying to show how the whole basis on which the Labour party, and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in particular, has manoeuvred, with unrivalled perseverance and occasional skill, is misguided. It does not work. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) is entirely right. It is a false supposition that has brought the Labour party, through all this ingenuity and this maze of amendments, to this particular position.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: This amendment does not, and cannot be argued to, incorporate the social chapter in the treaty and therefore bind it on this country. What the House has achieved is an undertaking, soon to be embodied in law, that there will be a debate on the substance, but that debate does not flow from this amendment or from this discussion.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I will give way to my hon. Friend before I close.

4.45 pm

In view of what the right hon. Member for Copeland said about other partners and their views, I would remind the House that all those states——

Mr. Budgen rose——

Mr. Hurd: I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then not give way later.

Mr. Budgen: In view of my right hon. Friend's answer to our hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), does he agree that when the Home Secretary and the chairman of the Conservative party addressed the conference at Harrogate, knowing the advice that the Attorney-General had given to my right hon. Friend, it was rather unfortunate that it was said that any Conservative Member who voted for amendment No. 27 was voting for the imposition of the social chapter on this country?

Mr. Hurd: I cannot recall the phrases or the dates on which they were used, but we shall see when we come to the debate which follows from clause 5. That will be the test because there will be no doubt then that we are voting on the substance of the social chapter. That is its purpose. So we will perhaps remember these exchanges on that occasion.

I should like to finish the point that I had started on. The right hon. Member for Copeland drew attention to our alleged isolation on the substance of this matter, but all those states that have already ratified the treaty have ratified the social protocol—that is to say, the British opt-out—along with the rest of the treaty. Despite their supposed preference that Britain should join them in the social chapter, they have not made a point of it or held up ratification on this issue. It is only the Labour party, to the constant puzzlement of its friends abroad, which persists in giving this matter priority.

The amendment, therefore, would not achieve either of the contradictory purposes of its backers. It could not possibly achieve both. It does not, in our view, achieve either.

Dr. John Cunningham: I am just wondering about the right hon. Gentleman as his speech unfolds. He has already repudiated his right hon. Friend the Minister of State in his own Department and now he has repudiated the view of his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. How many other colleagues' views will he repudiate in the ramshackle argument that he is advancing to the House?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure why I gave way to the right hon. Gentleman, because I stand absolutely on the statement, the analysis and the advice which we gave on 15 February on the essence of the matter and which my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General repeated on 22 February. That is our position and our advice. The two groups advocating this amendment cannot achieve their purpose by its passage.

What would the effect of the amendment be? It would depart—and here I come to why the Bill was drafted as it was—from our consistent legislative practice, which has been to list all amendments to the treaty of Rome in the 1972 Act. That has been the practice over the years. It has not been essential, but it has been desirable, for obvious reasons, to avoid possible confusion in British law. That is why we argued against amendment No. 27 and that is why, other things being equal, it will be desirable for the Bill to proceed as originally drafted. It comes under the heading of "desirable", and we have made that position clear ever since 15 February.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: May I just complete this point?

That is why we have argued that this amendment, like amendment No. 27 before it, is undesirable. Although it neither forces Britain to adopt the social agreement nor prevents ratification of the Maastricht treaty, that is why we have argued that it is none the less undesirable and that it would be preferable to incorporate the protocol in our

[Mr. Hurd]

domestic law in the usual way. That is the reason for the original drafting of the Bill and for the way in which we have phrased the arguments ever since.

Mr. Wilkinson: In what way would it be desirable for the British people to be called upon to pay for the imposition of the social chapter to which they are not a signatory? We are already the second highest net contributor to the Community. How would it benefit the British people? Would the elimination of this protocol not at least make payment by the British people more difficult?

Mr. Hurd: If the protocol were eliminated from the treaty, that would be so, but the amendment does not and cannot have that effect. I do not know whether there will be additional administrative expenses. It is a question of dividing electric light bills and salaries. But if there were, it would be entirely legal and reasonable that, through the procedures that I have already listed, those expenses should be met.

We are faced with an alliance of opposites and we must counter that. Their purpose is not to consider the opt-out on its merits—there will be an opportunity to do that in the debate on clause 5 of the Bill. I do not doubt, relying on the good sense of my hon. Friends on the Government Benches, that when we come to the debate on substance under clause 5, the House will confirm again its support for the opt-out. The only common purpose of those favouring the amendment is to inflict a defeat on the Government, which is reasonable and understandable from the point of view of the Opposition. I do not see why, in the circumstances that I have described, we should give them that satisfaction. *[Interruption.]* As I have tried to show —and I think that the argument has been listened to with patience—this amendment is tiresome, undesirable, but, in practice, irrelevant.

The Government are prepared to acquiesce on the amendment—*[Interruption.]*—on the basis that I have explained, rather than give our push-me pull-you opponents the entirely synthetic victory, revealed by their cackles, that they crave.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Well, well, there we are. The Foreign Secretary, in another context a few moments ago, said that the attitude to the social chapter adopted by the Opposition parties was a constant puzzlement to our friends abroad. I would have said that the Foreign Secretary's various speeches about the social chapter certainly well merit that particular description.

We are now told, in the presence of the Attorney-General, that legislation is cast in a manner in which things are put in that are preferable and desirable—not necessary, but preferable and desirable. I am no lawyer, but all my lawyer friends—of whom I have, sadly, quite a number —always tell me that the essence of legislation is the words that it contains, all of which are necessary. I presume that that is why all legislation is so spare and lean.

In any event, the Liberal Democrats contend that, far from being simply preferable and desirable, the words contained in the amendment which the Government have now accepted are necessary and have certain definite effects. That is a view which the Foreign Secretary contests, but he will have to admit that it is held by a considerable number of persons of very considerable legal reputation. There is no doubt that, by accepting this amendment, in due course of time a legal challenge will be made and it will then be determined whether we and others are right or the Government are right. Our contention, in essence, is that the Maastricht treaty and the social protocol to it are separate legal entities. That is also made clear in clause 1(2) of the Bill. We would therefore argue —as did my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) when he intervened on the Foreign Secretary—that if amendment No. 2 is accepted, as it now is, while it will not affect ratification of the treaty about which the Foreign Secretary agrees, it will compel the Government to renegotiate the social protocol with the other 11 member states. Even if the Government deny this, it is our contention that in time a challenge to the European Court will reveal them to be wrong. That will not force the Government to accept the social chapter—in the end we cannot force them to accept it despite our various efforts.

The Foreign Secretary talked about an alliance of opposites. I agree with him; I have said in other speeches that there was a putative alliance of opposites.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): An unholy alliance.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It must be if I voted with him.

Sir Russell Johnston: The knowledge of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on ecclesiastical matters is greater than my own.

Mr. Skinner: Bishop Cormack.

Sir Russell Johnston: I have lost the thread of my argument.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman should sit down while he is winning.

Sir Russell Johnston: I was talking about the putative alliance between the Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Benches, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, who would have united to support an amendment to the social chapter—in the alliance one group favours Maastricht, the other group sees it as a means of defeating Maastricht.

There is another group in the House, however, consisting of a number of Conservative Members who do not fear the social chapter. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), the former Prime Minister, does not fear the social chapter; nor that it will have all the horrific consequences that have been spelt out at various times by various Ministers, by and large in a fairly unclear way. Those hon. Members in the Conservative party—the one-nation Tories—are not afraid, in their political attitudes, to accept that the state has a responsibility to ensure that certain minimum social standards are sustained and, if necessary, legislated upon. A considerable number of people in the Conservative party hold that view, but given the nature of the voting structure of the House they would be compelled to vote against what they want. So the Foreign Secretary, in talking about this alliance of opposites—and I agree that he has a fair point—omits the other group that is equally important.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is always a great pleasure to listen to the hon. Gentleman; I think that he adds a great deal to these debates. As a constitutionalist, would he not agree that it would be very odd for a Government of this country to ratify a treaty —whether or not that was legal—part of which Parliament had voted to exclude in a democratic debate on the Floor of the House?

Would the hon. Gentleman respond to that question and expand on the relevant point raised by his hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) about the European Assembly Elections Act 1978 relating to the authority of the House in respect of the particular matter to which the hon. Gentleman drew our attention?

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful for the kind remarks with which the hon. Gentleman commenced his intervention. I take note of them and will, of course, immediately give way to him the next time he tries to intervene.

As to the first point that the hon. Gentleman made, I do not think that if this House voted to exclude the social protocol—and indeed the contention I was making at the very beginning of my remarks was that, although we have not voted about it, because amendment No. 2 has been accepted, it has had the same consequences—I do not take the view that that necessarily means that the Government is prevented in any way from ratifying the main treaty. That is what I said at the beginning, and perhaps I am repeating myself because I did not make myself clear. So, as to the first point the hon. Gentleman made, the answer is no.

As to the second point, I confess that I was not entirely clear about what difference he was making, but the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) stands on its own; we think that the European Assembly Elections Act 1978 has the legal consequence to which my hon. Friend referred.

I will not delay the House; we know what the situation is. We have already spent twenty one and three quarter hours debating the social chapter in Committee—I had that checked earlier—and that does not include the three and a half hours we spent querying your decision, Mr. Morris. That is a very long time.

So while any complaint about our not having spent sufficient time debating the social chapter cannot be substantiated—because we have had ample opportunity to debate it. I deeply regret the way in which the Government were unwilling to make it possible for the House to express a decision on the subject.

While much has been said about an alliance of opposites, it must be accepted that such alliances are not new in the House of Commons. Hon. Members vote on various occasions for all sorts of reasons, and in some cases because they are dragooned to do what they really do not want to do. There is nothing startling or different about what has happened. Even so, I regret that we were not given an opportunity to express a decision on the matter.

At the end of the day, amendment No. 2 is accepted. I regard that as a step towards Britain being in a position to take advantage of the safeguards that the social chapter represents. That is why I greatly welcome the Government's decision to accept the amendment.

5 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In the agreeable and gentlemanly way in which we expect my right hon. Friend to address the House, the Foreign Secretary revealed how amendment No. 2 is the joke of the week. Perhaps we should have a quiet chuckle, go home and say, "It was all a misunderstanding." Joke or not, a few issues arise from what has happened and they will not go away.

I begin with one such issue on a personal basis. We must try to do something to improve communications between Ministers. The Foreign Secretary will recall that he had the pleasure of attending the Harrogate conference. While I am fortunate in having a pleasant and easy-going constituency, many of my hon. Friends have been through the most appalling experience of receiving threatening letters and of being accused of selling out the Conservative party because they proposed to vote for the mad communist policy of the social chapter in the form of amendment No. 27.

While the Foreign Secretary may regard that as a joke, I assure him that it was not a joke for decent, honourable Conservative Members who, unwillingly, were voting against their party in an effort to put right what they believed to be wrong and contrary to the interests of their country. We had Cabinet Ministers standing up at Harrogate speaking what they knew was basically a load of rubbish, and later they admitted it was rubbish.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I appreciate that my hon. Friend is extremely agitated on that point. So that he and the rest of us may be more at rest, will he assure us that when it comes to the vote on new clause 74—which will be a vote of principle on the question whether Britain should sign up to the social protocol—he will vote with the Government?

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend knows that I have always taken that view and I will answer his question directly. The whole issue of the social chapter represents the most bogus nonsense I have ever heard in my life. It is the culmination of party virility symbols, with the Conservative party saying, "This is terrible communist conspiratorial nonsense" and the Labour party saying, "Poor British workers will not have the same rights as foreigners."

When replying to comments of mine recently, the Foreign Secretary was kind enough to explain some of what was in the social chapter which was not in the rest of the document. He gave me a list of small items—for example, redundancy payments—which previously required unanimity but which would require a majority vote. But we would like to know—perhaps it can be discovered from the Commission—what on earth can be done under the social chapter which cannot already be done under the health and safety legislation. An examination of an issue such as the 48-hour week directive shows that there is nothing much in it, apart from social security, subject of course to unanimity.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend was misinformed if he was told that the Foreign Secretary said what he said he said, because how a contract is terminated—in other words, redundancy pay—is a matter for unanimity.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am simply making the point that it has become a party virility symbol, with people waving their arms about. But,

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

sadly, the ordinary people have been left out because, for reasons of which we are well aware, the issue has become all-important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) asks if I can be trusted to vote the right way. While I can be so trusted, it would not make a great deal of difference whichever way I voted. But I assure him that he can count on my straightforward loyalty, the sort of loyalty that he always gives the Government, irrespective of the issue.

It is genuinely worrying that there should have been such a huge difference in the assessment of legal opinion by the Government. It may be regarded as a joke, but for a senior Government Minister—on the advice of officials of our splendid Foreign Office, who can always be relied on to tell the truth about everything—to say that under the terms of amendment No. 27 it would be impossible for the United Kingdom to ratify the treaty, represents a carefully thought out and clear statement of principle. Now we are told that that is a load of nonsense and that it will have no such effect.

The Foreign Secretary is one of the more gentlemanly members of the Government and a decent chap, too. He should worry about the possibility that those sorts of statement are being made, not in an effort to set the facts before people but simply to gather cheap votes in the House of Commons.

I am in no way suggesting that the Liberal Democrats, for whom I have high regard, are cheap people, but they will be well aware of what happened in the debate. One might gather from what was being put to the Liberal Democrats that they are about the only people in the House who believe all the European nonsense, for they were being told, in effect, "If you vote for the amendment, you might put your Europe at risk." We should worry about that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I invite my hon. Friend to answer the question that I put in an intervention to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). Does he consider it constitutionally appropriate that the British Government should ratify a treaty to which the social protocol has been attached when the House has agreed that the social protocol should not be part of the treaty? What is the point of having protracted debates if the Government then do precisely what the House has said they should not do?

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an important point that should concern hon. Members, but we need not worry too much about it in terms of European legislation because the Government have said, "We can chuck out the protocol from British law. But do not worry because we shall still stick it in the treaty and that will be that." In other words, the Government will support amendment No. 2, by which they will remove the protocol from British law, although, according to what was said in the previous debate, it will be included in the treaty which will be ratified. If I am wrong about that, perhaps the Foreign Secretary will correct me.

Mr. Hurd: Ratified, subject of course to my hon. Friends and the House as a whole approving the Third Reading.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My right hon. Friend is correct. He is saying that even though we have voted to chuck out and tear up that part of the treaty—because we are not prepared to have the protocol in the treaty—nevertheless, it will be in the treaty that Britain signs.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will ask his colleagues in the Foreign Office, who always tell the truth about everything, to say how many times in the history of the United Kingdom a Government have ratified a treaty from which the House of Commons has said that a part should be excluded. There must be hundreds of such examples and we await all the papers flowing to us showing the House voting to remove a clause from a treaty and then the Government of the day ratifying it. Being a simple person, I am not aware of such a case. There must be something significant about that.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My hon. Friend is developing a completely bogus argument. If the amendment is accepted tonight, the impact of the social protocol will be excluded from clause 1. But given, under the social protocol in the treaty, that we opted out in any event, the terms of the social protocol would not have applied in the first place. That is why the Attorney-General said that it was a double negative. There is absolutely no restriction on the Government, subject to Third Reading and the Bill passing through both Houses, seeking Royal Assent and ratifying the treaty.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend has a strange idea of what we are meant to do in the House of Commons. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to say that the Finance Bill would contain a new tax on red ties, the House voted against that tax, and the Chancellor went ahead with the Finance Bill all the same, some of us might be angry.

Mr. Milligan: The fault in my hon. Friend's logic is that if the House of Commons were to vote for us to sign the social chapter and we did not, it would be in defiance of the wishes of the House, but the amendment is unclear on that issue.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend, who has recently become a Member of Parliament, is a guardian of democracy and a regular attender of our debates. Unlike most of those who voted for the treaty, he has often been in the Chamber. When hon. Members vote to have something chucked out of the treaty—which is what we are doing with amendment No. 2 because we do not want the protocol—that action should be significant. However, it is being said that such action has nothing to do with it and the protocol is not an opt-out.

Mr. Marlow: It is a simple matter. The Government came before the House with a treaty. The House has torn out some of its pages and thrown them away. Given the sovereignty of the House, how can the Government proceed to ratify the treaty when it has pages missing?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: That is it in a nutshell.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Yes, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has put it in a nutshell. My lengthy speech has given the Foreign Office boys plenty of time to compile a list of the previous occasions when the House of Commons has voted to take something out of a treaty, then proceeded to ratify the treaty. I am sure that many examples have now been gathered and the Minister of State will list them.

Despite the fact that honest, decent and respectable Members of Parliament have fought hard on their constituents' behalf, those Members have been accused by Ministers and leaders of the Tory party of being conspirators and of wanting to impose communist and socialist policies on this country. We now know—indeed, we always did—that the protocol merely achieves two little things.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The oldest fight for the House of Commons is the fight against legislative authority and prerogative power. Are not we having a rerun of Charles I versus Parliament? *[Laughter.]*

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. Some hon. Members may laugh, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) knows that many people in Harrow share my views, not his—although they all love him.

I hope that it is appreciated that the Maastricht treaty is destroying our democracy. It means that people who vote——

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I had the impression—perhaps wrongly—that the Single European Act took away much of our power. Who steered it through the House? Baroness Thatcher, Lord Tebbit and many others who are now called rebels, like the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). Their voting record on Europe was better than that of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). How can my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) say that the Maastricht treaty threatens us and the Single European Act did not?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I have a high regard for my hon. Friend, but he knows that I fought against the Single European Act and voted against every clause of the Bill. However, that is not at issue. It does not help the genuine argument to state that the previous Prime Minister was worse than the present one. I am talking not about that, but of the rights of my hon. Friend's constituents and the rights of the British people. It does not matter to me who voted for what—all I know is that something bad has happened.

What does the protocol include? It does not include many of the issues that some people said it did. It says that the 11 members can use the institutions to implement their social chapter and that British taxpayers—my constituents and others—will have to pay a 12th share. The Foreign Secretary, who is always helpful with legal advice, said that even if we chucked the social chapter out of the Bill it would not matter because

"the likelihood is that they"—

the costs—

"will be a charge upon the Consolidated Fund, as authorised under the 1972 legislation."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 33.]

5.15 pm

My understanding of the 1972 legislation was that it authorised us to pay for Community obligations—obligations of the 12 members, not obligations of six, seven, eight or nine members. We are talking about an agreement of the 11. There is a serious problem—goodness knows how we can resolve it. The problem can probably be solved only in the courts of law. We know that if the Government want to ratify the treaty, including the protocol, many British citizens will consider it wrong. They will say, "If our Parliament has voted against paying for a twelfth share of the administrative costs and the Government say that they can do so under the 1972 legislation, we think that the issue should be clarified in a court of law." I think that it is inevitable that a British citizen will want the matter to be clarified in that way.

Unfortunately, despite the attempts to call the matter a big joke, it could result in a long delay for the treaty's ratification. I do not know anything about the law—the Minister of State knows it all. I am told that when a European issue is taken to court, one is sometimes told that the matter will have to go to the European Court, which could involve even more delay.

The House should appreciate that something nasty has happened over amendments Nos. 27 and 2. A lot of rubbish has been spoken and people have been wrongly abused and misled. We have created a bit of legal nonsense. I prophesy that the amendment could result in a long delay in the ratification of the Maastricht treaty. We could end up with people having rows and disputes and the lawyers earning more money through discussions in court.

It would have been easier and simpler if our pleasant Foreign Secretary and our clever Government had avoided the trouble and prevented the embarrassment caused to the Labour party by simply saying that we should let the people decide such a big issue with a referendum. If the Labour party had wanted it, the referendum could have included a second question: "If you approve of the treaty, do you want it to include the social chapter?" If we had had a referendum and let the people decide what should happen to their powers, freedom and liberty, the lengthy debates, nastiness, disagreements and unfortunate incidents that we have witnessed would have been unnecessary.

What has happened today has not been a joke, but a sad reflection on the way in which we have managed the dreadful treaty. The freedom and liberty of the British people belong to the people, not the politicians. We have no right to hand over those powers without asking the people first.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I am not one of those who believe that a great deal turns on the protocol or the social agreement. Anyone who reads the protocol and the social agreement will have to concede that the terms are astonishingly vague and general. It is hard to see that they achieve anything that is not equally well achieved elsewhere in the treaty of Rome and other provisions. The lie to the contrary argument was conclusively given by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) in his contribution to the substantive debate that we held some months ago.

It is easy to see why the respective Front Bench teams want to pretend that the issue is one of great substance. The Labour Front Bench team finds it convenient to use its support for the social agreement as a stick with which to beat the Government, so giving the illusion of firm opposition while ensuring that the substantive measure —the Bill—is passed, effectively unamended.

It is equally easy to see why the Prime Minister is a willing participant in that charade. He has to explain to Conservative Members, the House and the country why he has accepted a treaty that runs so contrary to our interests. Therefore, he hopes to bamboozle the ideologues among his hon. Friends by saying that he has secured a signal victory on a matter of great importance. The truth is that

[Mr. Bryan Gould]

it is not a matter of great importance, so it is perhaps a little peculiar that we have debated at length a protocol that has such a limited effect.

I am one of those who would rather not have the treaty, but if we are to have it I would, on balance, rather have the protocol and the social agreement—modest and marginally helpful little pieces of verbiage. So if a vote is called this evening, I will be happy to vote for the Labour amendment.

What is much more important—I do not believe that any of the supporters or opponents of the social protocol would dispute this—for the purposes of our debate today is not the effect of carrying or failing to carry the amendment; it is the effect—the procedural, legal and constitutional effect—on the future of the Bill and the treaty. That is what preoccupies us this evening, and rightly so.

The real question is: if we carry this amendment, what will be the impact on the Government's ability to ratify the treaty? At first glance, some Ministers will argue that the decision taken by the House of Commons does not count. They will try to say that by running away from a Division they have disarmed those who have forced the amendment through. Let us be under no illusion about what has happened, however. It does not matter whether this decision is imposed on the Government by a majority vote or whether the Government simply yield to the will of Parliament. At the end of the evening Parliament will decide, and it will decide to accept the amendment and hence to exclude from the Bill the social protocol.

Then there will be those who mutter, perhaps from the Conservative Back Benches, that we can disregard this decision because the motivations of those who support it are so at variance and, indeed, contradictory. That may well be true, but it is also true of many decisions that we take in this House. If anyone ever inquired into some of our decisions, the results would doubtless be somewhat unedifying. In almost every case we would discover that the primary reason why most of our colleagues vote on a given issue is the fact that they are told to do so by the Whips—and had there been a Division this evening, that would have been true of this occasion as well.

The truth is that it does not matter a toss what our motivations are. They will always vary; they will always be inconsistent; it is never profitable or necessary to inquire into what they may be. What matters is the decision of the House. So the amendment is to be carried and the Bill will carry on its face a statement of the House's hostility to the opt-out protocol.

What are the legal consequences of this decision? The first question to be asked is: what is the consequence for domestic law? After all, the purpose of the Bill is not to ratify the treaty: it is to incorporate those parts of the treaty that need incorporation into domestic law. The House will say that it does not wish to incorporate the protocol in domestic law. On that question it might be assumed that there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence to suggest that this matters a great deal; otherwise, why would the Government have insisted when they drafted the Bill that this provision should be included in it and thus incorporated into domestic law? Incidentally, the Foreign Secretary was rather disingenuous when he tried to explain, quite wrongly, that it was a matter of convention that all amendments to the treaty of Rome were listed and therefore incorporated. The very Bill with which we are dealing distinguishes between the parts of the amending treaty which are to be incorporated and the parts which are not.

The Government must explain why they incorporated the protocol in the parts of the treaty which they believed had to be incorporated in domestic law, and why they have since changed their mind, saying now that it does not matter.

For a long period the legal advice, as one would suppose in this context, was that a refusal to incorporate the provision in domestic law would create a real problem for the Government. It is surely common ground that if a disparity arises between our commitments as incorporated in domestic law and the commitments that we undertake under treaty law, it becomes impossible for the Government to ratify the treaty. This could hardly, therefore, be of more central importance.

So we have the mystery not only of the original drafting but of the sustained legal advice to the effect that, in accordance with the drafting, a failure to incorporate would make for real problems. Then there was the further mystery, even once the legal advice had been magically changed, that it was still the Government's position that they would resist this amendment to the utmost. The fact that they have now faced the inevitable does not alter the fact that, until an hour ago, as far as we knew, the Government attached considerable importance to voting down the amendment.

So all the presumptions must be that a failure to incorporate the protocol makes a great deal of difference. Nevertheless, speaking as a lawyer—sometimes it is not wise to admit that—I am inclined to take the view that the Attorney-General's opinion is likely to be proved right: that the Government, having had second and better thoughts, have, on the balance of probabilities, come up with the right answer. Incidentally, we are told in interviews and statements conducted outside the House that the Attorney-General has ruled on the matter. We should remember that he is not a court of law; he is simply offering an opinion which may or may not be correct. We wait to see, if it is tested in the courts, whether it proves correct.

Mr. Skinner: We are often told that we debate legislation in this place in a way that is different from how other nations in the Common Market debate theirs—we discuss it line by line and clause by clause. As the Speaker has selected this amendment, it must be a valid amendment or it could not have been selected. Would not a court of law, therefore, say that the amendment must, prima facie, be in order and fit for incorporation in our law? Would not that argument carry more weight than the Attorney-General's statement to the House?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend makes a further persuasive point on the side of the argument that there must have been a purpose in incorporating the provision—or attempting to—in the first place, so failing to incorporate it must have some legal consequence.

Let us return to my personal view—it is the best that I can arrive at—which is that the Attorney-General, on balance, would be the favourite to win if the issue were litigated in a court of law. That is not to say that he would win. There is a powerful argument to be made along the

lines of what my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) have said, to the effect that the absence of the exclusion of the social agreement, as achieved by the protocol, might matter to domestic law. I confess that I find it a little difficult to think of a case in point, but one would not be beyond the bounds of possibility.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Perhaps my hon. Friend has discovered a sliver of a case that the Foreign Secretary might have had for completeness and clarity's sake. There is a major flaw in the argument, however. Clearly, the legal advisers in the Foreign Office who advised the Minister of State and the adviser-in-chief to the Attorney-General hold views that are widely differing. The former say that adoption would preclude ratification, the latter that the issue is more or less neutral and does not matter either way. My hon. Friend may have some knowledge of the legal department in the Foreign Office; it appears that the Government did not even get their legal arguments straight before the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) delivered his initial opinion.

Mr. Gould: The fact that the Foreign Office legal advisers and the Attorney-General's legal advisers reached diametrically opposite conclusions makes the point, which is surely apparent to everybody and which perhaps I am somewhat labouring, that no one can be certain. As my hon. Friend suggested, I happen to know the Foreign Office chief legal adviser, Mr. Frank Berman, who is an excellent lawyer. I would be astonished if he had not based his conclusion on powerful and convincing legal argument. As we have not been privileged to see the detail of the argument, either for or against, my best estimate is that the Attorney-General might prevail.

However, the point that I wish to emphasise is that it would be worth while if an appropriate case could be found to test the matter in the courts. If the Attorney-General turned out to be wrong, that would be —I am sure my hon. Friend would agree—a bar to the Government's being able to ratify the treaty. All that I can say to those who are contemplating litigating on the issue is that it should be done soon, as the possibility of getting a judicial review of a statute is pretty slight.

5.30 pm

Mr. Wilkinson: Could the hon. Gentleman give us his learned opinion on a matter that I referred to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, but on which he gave no reply because by then, in naval parlance, he was already making smoke prior to withdrawal? As the protocol will be eliminated by acceptance of the amendment by Her Majesty's Government, will there be no obligation in British law to accept its provisions? Does that mean that the United Kingdom could get away with not paying its contribution to the costs of the administration of the social charter on behalf of the others who have signed it, or will the European Court oblige us to pay our contribution to that to which we are not a signatory?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman raises what I can best describe as a "colourable" argument. If a citizen could overcome the problems of locus standi, which in my view are never as great as they are said to be, that argument might lead to a justiciable issue on which a court might have to decide. In those circumstances, there is at least a chance that the court will decide against the Attorney-General and in favour of the Foreign Office legal advice.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman has said that he knows all about the Foreign Office legal department. If that case were to come before the court, does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be beneficial, indeed essential, that those in the Foreign Office who gave their legal advice came before the court and explained the legal advice?

Mr. Gould: I am sure that means might be found to produce that sort of expression of opinion if the matter were ever litigated.

I want to pass on to a second possible aspect of tonight's decision. It is not the obstacle to ratification that would be imposed by some disparity between the treaty and domestic law. Rather, it is the effect of the statement by the House on the propriety of the Government exercising their prerogative power to ratify a treaty in defiance of what the House has said. Everybody concedes —it is a well-established part of our constitution—that the power to ratify a treaty is a prerogative power that is not to be affected, at least not easily or directly, by the deliberations of the House. Some would argue that it is not even justiciable in the courts.

However, as often happens in such cases, a convention has grown up. It was established nearly 70 years ago and given the title the Ponsonby rule. It is the convention that certain treaties of major importance should not be ratified in the exercise of prerogative power without being laid before Parliament for 21 days. That practice has varied and has sometimes been abandoned, but nevertheless it has been a pretty constant feature of our practice over that 70-year period. One can only assume that the whole purpose of laying the treaty for 21 days so that Parliament can consider it is to enable Parliament to express an opinion.

What we do not know, as far as I am aware, is what would happen if Parliament expressed a view that was contrary to the treaty—if Parliament said, "We don't want you to ratify the treaty." We certainly do not know that in the European context because in the case of the great Acts of Parliament that preceded the Bill—in 1972, 1986 and so on—no such attempt to change the treaty or express a different view from that in the treaty succeeded. This is novel. We are in uncharted territory. We simply do not know what would be the court's view—or even whether it would accept that there was a justiciable case—if it was asked in such circumstances whether it would be right for the Government to ratify the treaty in defiance of a solemn expression of opinion by the House of Commons.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): My hon. Friend said that there was no precedent for that happening. Has he dismissed from his memory, or thought not appropriate, the case of the Laval pact of 1934? The rejection of that pact by the House led to the abandonment of it and the resignation of the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Gould: That is an interesting precedent. Perhaps I should refine the point that I am making. What would be the consequence of the House saying that it was prepared to endorse the treaty as a whole, but that it objected to part of it? That creates a problem. Everybody concedes that one cannot ratify in part. One either ratifies a treaty or one

[Mr. Gould]

does not. Let us imagine that we were arguing the case before a court, although nobody can be sure that we could get it before a court. No doubt the Government would say that Parliament has endorsed the treaty by a majority on Second Reading and on the paving debate. Those on the other side would say that, in a subsequent vote, Parliament made it clear—that has nothing to do with legislation because we are doing two separate things at the same time—that, quite apart from what happens in legislation, its solemn view is that it does not want the protocol.

Unfortunately for us, it is not open for us to say that we do not want the protocol in the treaty because that is not a judgment for us to take. We can do only two things—decide what goes into domestic law and, in accordance with the conventions, express a view on whether this is a treaty that we can support and which the Government are therefore authorised to ratify. I argue that, in accepting the amendment, we would not only change the Bill but we would make it as clear as it could conceivably be made clear that the House of Commons, unanimously—for whatever reasons—does not want the protocol. That is the judgment of the House.

We therefore need to know the consequence of that. All that I suggest is that, quite apart from the obstacles that might arise from the interpretation of domestic law, there may be, in accordance with constitutional convention, some inhibition on the Government's ratifying the treaty in those circumstances, particularly when, as is inevitable, we come to vote on Third Reading. A vote for the Bill on Third Reading will not be a vote for the treaty, but will be a vote, as far as we can engineer it, for part of the treaty but shorn of the protocol. We shall have done it twice and we can hardly do it in more solemn, considered or deliberate fashion.

After all those hours of debate and all the attention, importance and significance invested in the decision, it would be inconceivable that, the House having reached such a view and expressed it in the most solemn form open to it and, through the agency of people such as myself, pointed to the consequences in terms of the Ponsonby rule and the constitutional conventions, the Government could then blithely go on and ratify the treaty.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that his argument carries less force if one views the protocol as a separate international agreement not affected by the ratification of the treaty as a whole? Does he further accept that the internal language of the protocol makes it clear that the signatories of the protocol regarded it not as an integral agreement but as a separate agreement, although one related to the treaty, and that the failure to approve the protocol would not damage the ratification process of the treaty itself? It certainly calls into question whether it is appropriate to declare, as appears to be the Foreign Secretary's intention, that Britain will ratify the social protocol regardless of what Parliament says.

Mr. Gould: That point has been argued on a number of occasions by the hon. Gentleman and others in his party, but in all honesty I do not think that it has any merit. I speak only from memory, but I believe that the 1978 Act declared that a treaty includes the protocols and all the other bits and pieces that go with the treaty. There is no question but that the protocol is part of the treaty for the purposes of the 1978 Act and, therefore, for the purposes of clause 1(2) of the Bill. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's argument fails.

In addition, clause 1(2) is absolutely conclusive on the fact that, for the purposes of the 1978 Act, the treaty is approved—but that is only for the purposes of that Act and does not, in my view, touch the wider constitutional question with which I am dealing.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as the agreement on social policy is attached to the protocol—it could be argued that it is part of the protocol—it is annexed to the treaty? Is not it also clear that, under article 2 of the agreement, it is only through the unanimous action of the Council, on a Commission proposal to consult in the European Parliament, that the progeny of the protocol can be achieved? Therefore, it must be integral to the institutions of the Community and the treaties that establish them.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend must be right. In any ordinary interpretation of these matters, a protocol is part of the treaty. That was made clear in the 1978 Act. Although I sympathise with the purpose behind what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said, his point has no validity.

In the light of the arguments, uncertainties and confusions, it would be wrong of the Government blithely to assume that they can proceed in defiance of Parliament's will. Because of that, I want to make a particular point to my Front Bench spokesmen. We have the opportunity, if we wish, to stand up for Parliament on this issue. We can say that it is an outrage for a Government to say both in advance and in retrospect that they will pay no attention to the view of Parliament. If we are parliamentarians—and surely we are that, if nothing else—we must stand up for the authority of Parliament. The Opposition Front Bench, above all, has that obligation. The Executive will always try to get away with the issue, but the Opposition Front and Back Benchers must always be vigilant and protect Parliament.

We have it in our power to deliver a very harsh lesson to the Government if they refuse to listen to the voice of Parliament. The official Opposition can vote against Third Reading. There is no doubt that, by doing so, we can defeat the Government. Any Government posturing and blustering to the effect that they would take no notice of Parliament would be brought to a rapid conclusion. The Government would then have to sue for terms not just with us, but with their European partners. Surely that is exactly what we want, in our various ways. We want a renegotiation of the Maastricht treaty and we want to force the Government to negotiate a social agreement. So why do not we do that? I urge the Opposition Front Bench to act in the interests of Parliament and of the country and to do the job of an Opposition, which is to bring the Government to heel if they refuse to heed the voice of Parliament and persist in acting in defiance of it.

5.45 pm

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) spoke with his customary clarity and lucidity. We always listen carefully to his speeches. I agreed with much of what he said and, from the Opposition's general vantage point, I could understand his main points. However, I strongly disagree with his statement that the social

protocol and the opt-out provisions that the Government negotiated are an integral part of the treaty. I strongly agree with what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said on that point.

Far from it being right for the hon. Member for Dagenham to suggest that the Government are riding roughshod over the opinion of the House in respect of amendment No. 2, the reverse is true. I shall stand corrected if anyone wishes to intervene and say differently, but it is my understanding that the Government are accepting the will of the House by accepting an amendment that will change the text of clause 1.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, it is not the Government's fault that constitutionally, legally, juridically and in actual fact, the Bill and its text are different from the treaty. The hon. Gentleman conceded that reality. Indeed, it is the way that we deal with these matters in our international relations.

There is a difference between the Crown prerogative of the treaty and its provisions and the legislation that is needed to change some aspects of domestic law in the successive treaties that began with the treaty of Rome—when Britain was not yet a member—and then with the treaty of accession, when we decided to join. I cannot understand why hon. Members become so worked up about that point and think that the Government are being devious.

I feel no resentment towards the Opposition in general. I remind the hon. Member for Dagenham that, even if his colleagues followed his advice and voted against Third Reading, I assume that a substantial, respectable and admirable number of Opposition and other Members would support the Bill, or abstain at the very least. If that were not to be the case, it would be depressing, in view of the strong pro-European line that those hon. Members have displayed throughout our debates. We all know who I mean, and it is a considerable number of hon. Members. Perhaps they will be active in Labour party discussions between now and Third Reading to ensure that that point is conveyed.

I reserve my principal bitterness for my hon. Friends who have dealt the Government a very bad card in making unnecessary threats about amendment No. 2 and its predecessor, amendment No. 27.

Mr. Milligan: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is pretty rich for the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and our hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who say that they stand up for the voice of Parliament, to be supporting an amendment that will, in effect, transfer the decision on such a vital issue to unelected judges, rather than leaving it with elected Members of Parliament?

Mr. Dykes: That is a valid point. I hope that the homespun reality that those hon. Members probably could not afford to go to the courts might be a more practical restraint on them. The cavalier references by some of my hon. Friends to taking prolonged High Court action against our own Government and party are scandalous.

I use that word with some restraint. I feel bitter about such antics. I am one Conservative Member who might be tempted to accept some aspects of the social provisions. After all, many of the leading clauses appear in the Single European Act, and the remainder follow in the Maastricht treaty. The initial aspirations of the social provisions that will be adopted by the other 11 member states are written down, in the same language, in the Single European Act. We all know that.

I am probably one of those Conservative Members who would not get as worked up as others about the iniquities of the social provisions. But, bearing in mind that the Government achieved a remarkable and successful negotiation of their position vis-a-vis the Maastricht treaty and intend to ratify the overwhelming proportion of that treaty, with the exception, perhaps, of this and another segment, it is wrong and reprehensible to say the least—that is too mild a word—for my hon. Friends to threaten the Government who have a reduced majority after the election for one reason or another and a Government who were entitled to ask all their supporters to go ahead on their manifesto programme with the ratification of this important and mild treaty. The idea that there is any transfer or loss of sovereign intrinsic power from this House or any elected Government as a result of the treaty is pure garbage, and I am amazed that some hon. Members continue to repeat it.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not in his place, but I shall mention the point that I am about to raise to him afterwards. I disagree with his interpretation of the principle and meaning of the selection of an amendment by the Chair. I in no way wish to question the selection of amendments—I know that it is a delicate and sensitive subject nowadays, so for various reasons I shall refrain from doing so—but the fact that Madam Speaker at this stage of the Bill or the Chairman of Ways and Means at earlier stages selects an amendment does not mean that it is perfectly respectable in constitutional and juridical terms. I would be surprised if that were so. The hon. Member for Dagenham agreed with that assertion by the hon. Member for Bolsover, and I think that it is literally incorrect.

A selection represents an important subject for debate and an important potential amendment or change to an important part of the Bill, but that is all. I cannot imagine that it has the purist definition of textual purity, constitutional correctness, and juridical approbation, and that therefore learned judges or legal experts outside court systems would say that the amendment was correct in all those terms. I should be surprised if that were so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East is still in the Chamber. He has been one of the best attenders of these prolongued debates, and I pay tribute to him for that. I think that he was confused about the intentions and aspirations of the public outside. I have not noticed that there are millions of people in Britain worrying about any loss of power as a result of the treaty, or that there is any great interest in it even. That is no criticism of them. I think that they regard it as a fairly routine matter. What appals them and many people in the House is the amount of time that has been spent on unnecessary debate.

I say that deliberately, and I do not mean to be anti-democratic or to say that the House does not have the right to have such prolonged debate. I do not mean that at all. I am talking about the misinterpretation of the substance of the treaty and the mischievous and mis-explanation of it for purposes to do with our original entry into the Community as a member state rather than the further development of the gradual integration of some decision making—not all—in the Community, which I find completely acceptable.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend when he has said exceptionally kind things about me, but I make him a public offer. I should be happy to donate £100 to the European Movement if he can find a majority of people in any street in his constituency who are not in favour of a referendum. I find that the vast majority of people say that they do not know about Maastricht and they want to know about it and to have a say in it. I shall go with my hon. Friend to any place in Harrow, and if the majority there do not want a referendum I shall give him £100.

Mr. Dykes: When Baroness Thatcher was Prime Minister, she stopped the grant to the European Movement in 1985, but I should be happy to accept my hon. Friend's offer for reasons unconnected with this debate. Again, my hon. Friend misunderstands what I am saying. If anyone in the street is told that he is being deprived of a say in something and asked whether he would like a say in it, the answer will be overwhelmingly yes.

Some Opposition Members say that referendums are wonderful, sacred, very important and so on and should not be limited to this subject. What about capital punishment? Others say no, there are other key subjects. If we had a referendum, we know that the result would be totally uncongenial to all members of the official Opposition. Therefore, that argument does not arise.

More important and relevant is the reality of those matters. I think that I am right in saying that, in the Newbury by-election campaign—we shall see the conclusion and result of that tomorrow and, axiomatically, I hope for a Government win and I think that there will be one—the opinion polls revealed that, despite the hysterical antics of the Euro-sceptics, the anti-Europeans and Alan Sked screaming around the town to a bemused public about the dangers and evils of federalism, the subjects of concern to people were mainly economic problems, unemployment and so on. Only 6 per cent. were concerned with the European Community.

Alan Sked, heroically and bravely, stood in Bath at the election as the anti-federal candidate against Chris Patten, now Governor of Hong Kong, and won 117 votes. An anti-federal candidate in Harrow, East won 49 votes. There is more than one such candidate standing in the Newbury by-election, and I think that we shall see a similar result tomorrow. It is nonsense to say that the public are worked up about this. What they have been worked up about are the prolonged debates, which appear to mean that even pro-Europeans in the House have voluntarily and enthusiastically chosen to spend hours on repeat debates on unnecessary amendments.

I say that in no anti-democratic spirit at all. That is the literal reality. That is what has concerned the House of Commons—this so-called sovereign and primordially important Parliament, the one that we all love—rather than the crucial economic problems that most preoccupy members of the public. In the end, that is the disturbing thing for the anti-Europeans, as well as the way in which some Conservative Members have let down the Government.

I have read again and again the legal judgment of the Attorney-General in order to convince myself that I understand it—the advice given not only to the Government but to the House on the matter—and I am satisfied with it. I think that I was also able to follow what the Foreign Secretary was saying, and there may be further explanation and elucidation from the Government on the matter.

I do not see that any of this would impede the ratification of the treaty, which pleases me, because I am impatient for it. It will be of great, good value and good store for Britain's future welfare. That is why I am glad that, after much muddle and delay, which I regret, some of which could have been avoided, we now face that position.

I enjoin the House now to proceed on the basis of what appears to be being agreed in the debate in all parts of the House, depending on the later outcome of any votes or questions that may be put. That will then be the way to deal with the matter in the most acceptable way, without in any way reducing the basic democratic decision-making of the House of Commons in respect of an important treaty.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the demonology of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), I could be termed a true believer in the Community, but I do him the credit of being a true believer in what he says on the other side of the argument. It is from the position of a true believer that I want to ask a question of the Foreign Secretary which concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and others of us. I have, for the sake of convenience, given the officials the background against which I put the question.

The matter started with a letter on 3 April addressed to me by someone writing from Switzerland. He said:

"I am sending you a copy of an advertisment which has appeared now for five consecutive weeks in the Basle Zeitung. Although obviously as a British subject working in Switzerland I have nothing against the investment of Swiss capital in the UK, I feel that the negative image of Britain as a country with low wages and poor social conditions is something which should be improved and rapidly rather than extolled as a virtue."

It will be recollected that in France, during what I must encapsulate as the Cambuslang-Dijon problem—when Enoch Powell was a Member of the House, he had the habit of expressing a view succinctly by giving it a heading—there was considerable ill-feeling when the workers of the Hoover plant in Dijon apparently lost their jobs because of the lower wages paid in Cambuslang. It was rather more complicated than that, but that was basically the situation.

I do not go along with the argument—which is not true—that the Cambuslang workers were in any way underpaid by British standards, nor will I indulge in any criticism of the Hoover factory. It was said, however, that the Hoover workers in Cambuslang were able to keep their jobs because France had accepted the social chapter and we had not.

I do not wish to quote the advertisement in full; that would not be possible anyway, because it is in German. However, it begins:

"Niedriger Landkosten in Grossbritannien."

It suggests that there is every opportunity to invest in Great Britain, because of the lower wages and lesser obligations involved. I have given a copy of the advertisement to the Foreign Office.

6 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is something mean-minded and demeaning, in the eyes of the British people, about their Foreign Office spending public money on an advertisement

campaign in Switzerland—and, as we know from Monday's *Guardian*, another in the Federal Republic of Germany—telling people that this country is a haven for low standards and low pay.

My hon. Friend was present when, in his speech the week before last, the Foreign Secretary dismissed with a flick of the wrist the argument that jobs moved around on the basis of wages and conditions. Why, then, is public money being spent to lower our country's standards and its reputation abroad? My hon. Friend has raised a valid point, which I strongly endorse.

Mr. Dalyell: I have been told to be succinct——

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dalyell: I rather hoped that the Foreign Secretary would comment at this stage, so that we could get the point about the advertisement out of the way now. However, I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mallon: Let me reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point by alluding to the removal of the Digital plant from Galway to Ayr. The same argument was used in that instance—that, because the Republic of Ireland had ratified the Maastricht treaty, cheap labour was available in Ayr. That, surely, must be bad for the whole concept of competition on a level playing field within the European Community.

Mr. Dalyell: I am very glad that I gave way to my hon. Friend. It so happens that I know a good deal about Digital, which has a huge and modern plant at South Queensferry. I have visited the Ayr plant, and have talked at length to the management there and at South Queensferry; I have also talked to the trade unions involved. I must admit that there is some embarrassment in Scotland about what happened in relation to Galway. Of course we were pleased to have the plant, but genuine sorrow was felt about those who suffered in Galway.

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps I should enable the point to be cleared up by giving way to the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Hurd: I have not yet seen the advertisement to which the hon. Gentleman referred; when I have done so, and have been able to examine the background, I shall write to him.

This argument—based, as it is, purely on statistics inside the European Community—is becoming increasingly unreal. The whole Community is becoming uncompetitive; the whole Community is allowing burdens on employers to increase, to such an extent that, if the process continues, it will soon be a question not of whether firms locate themselves in the Republic of Ireland or in Scotland, but of whether they locate themselves in Europe at all.

Mr. Dalyell: That raises real problems. When I invited the Foreign Secretary to intervene, I did not want to trick him into some long argument. I think that we should leave it at that for the moment, as was my undertaking.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton pointed out, other advertisements have appeared in other newspapers. People who place such advertisements do so at considerable expense to themselves: they must think that they are gaining some advantage, even if the Foreign Secretary and others do not. Those who advertise normally have their motives. I hope that the Foreign Office will reflect on the issue, and possibly write to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and others who are interested, including myself.

Mr. Marlow: I have here a copy of the Maastricht treaty. Through the decision that it has made today, the House is mutilating that treaty. Given the overriding sovereignty of the House and the significance of the issue, how can the Government—having seen the treaty mutilated—then ratify that mutilated treaty? That is the question that will be before the House and the country; that is the question that my constituents will ask. They will see that we have wrought great changes in the treaty today. It is not the treaty that the Government negotiated: it has been changed.

I have heard all the smart legal points about this being a Bill and a potential Act of Parliament—about Ponsonby rules, and the Government's entitlement to ratify treaties. My constituents, however, will say, "Here is a mutilated treaty." Parliament has decided to reject part of the treaty; how, then, can my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government, in all conscience, proceed to ratify this rotten relic of a rotten treaty?

Mr. Hurd: Only with the permission of the House, which will be expressed in the form of agreement to Third Reading.

Mr. Marlow: If the Bill is to have its Third Reading —I understand that that is dependent on the result of the Danish referendum, unless the Government change their mind about that as well—it will be Third Reading of a mutilated Bill, in connection with a mutilated treaty. Will the Government then be able to ratify the original treaty, given that the Third Reading given by the House will relate to a changed perception of a mutilated treaty? I am assuming that the House proceeds with Third Reading. In an eloquent speech, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) suggested that the House should reject the treaty at that stage. Even if the Bill secures its Third Reading, however, it will not be the original Bill, and the House will specifically exclude the social protocol in its assessment of the treaty. It will be saying no to the social protocol. How, after that, the Government can then ratify a wounded, mutilated treaty beggars belief.

In response to an intervention, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out that—along with hon. Friends who share my point of view—I had apparently supported the social protocol in earlier votes. I think my right hon. Friend will agree that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister never wanted the Maastricht treaty. It was not his idea; it was suggested by other countries on the continent. We felt that they were going too far too fast, and tried to slow them down. Eventually, my right hon. Friend was ambushed: he was put in a position where he had to go along with something. Along with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was involved in a devastating, excellent, brilliant holding operation—a damage-limitation exercise. The treaty that we have here is not the treaty that other European Governments would have wanted: I congratulate my right hon. Friends on that.

Before my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went to Maastricht, I gave him overall support, although I did not

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support every jot and tittle of the argument that he was taking to Maastricht. I realised that he had been ambushed, and that he wanted to do his best for the United Kingdom. Certainly, no one could have done better than he did 18 months ago—and no one could have done better than my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. We are all full of praise for his effectiveness in difficult circumstances. When my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister came back and it was put before the House—not far removed from the date of a potential election—yet again we supported my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister for the excellent work they had carried forward.

My right hon. Friend said that I supported the Government on Second Reading. That is not correct. I did not support the Government on Second Reading of the Bill. Many of my colleagues opposed the Government on Second Reading. My right hon. Friend has also made the point that if we vote for a package—for a lengthy amendment with a whole series of details in it—we support every single detail in it. Is my right hon. Friend saying that if in future we disagree with some small aspect of a composite amendment or composite motion we should therefore vote against it?

If that is the point that my right hon. Friend is trying to make, I suggest that he has a word with the Patronage Secretary. The Government are not in a particularly happy position with this legislation. If we have to believe that we are committed to every single thing in every amendment that we vote for in the future, I put it to my right hon. Friend that the job of the Patronage Secretary will be much more difficult than it has been in the past.

What is it all about? What is this social protocol? As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has said, it is a totem. The Government say that they have achieved a great success which will benefit the United Kingdom; we shall not be chained and shackled by the social protocol, as other Europeans will be. The Labour party looks at the social protocol and says that it is jammed full of benefits, that it is what we all want and that the people of Britain will be devastated if we cannot have it. But what is the reality? The social protocol is an agreement between 11 countries in Europe, from which we have an exemption. The agreement is that they can go ahead and work out these policies between them but that they should not apply to the United Kingdom. But what is the social protocol all about?

Article 1 concerns the objectives of the social protocol. It states:

"The Community and the Member States shall have as their objectives the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions".

Who can disagree with that? We are all in favour of promoting employment and, in so far as they do not destroy employment, improved living and working conditions. The article also states:

"To this end the Community and the Member States shall implement measures which take account of the diverse forms of national practices".

We do things differently here. So do Greece, Belgium, and Luxembourg. We shall be able to continue to do things differently in different parts of the Community. Would anybody disagree with that? According to the objectives, which set the tone of the whole of the social protocol, we also have to take account of

"the need to maintain the competitiveness of the Community economy."

All the burdens that my hon. Friends are concerned about have to be weighed against the effect that they will have on the competitiveness of United Kingdom and European industry and commerce. Is that something that we ought to be concerned about? What can be done which is of benefit to the working people of Europe and to the social cohesion of Europe if at the same time it undermines the competitiveness of the European Community and the countries within it? The objectives of the social protocol are something that Members of Parliament, if they look at them carefully, cannot object to. They represent pure motherhood; they are good. If we can get them, why worry about them?

Article 2 is the meat of the treaty. I shall return to it in a few moments. Articles 3 and 4 are permissive. In other words, if we do not like them we can say that they are nonsense. They deal with trade unions and management getting together, being permitted to do this, that and the other and the Commission becoming involved, if it can give a helping hand. They take a bit longer to say that, but is the substance any different from article 118B of the Single European Act, which says:

"The Commission shall endeavour to develop the dialogue between management and labour at European level which could, if the two sides consider it desirable, lead to relations based on agreement."?

That is an economical way of saying what is set out in articles 3 and 4. That is all; there is no great difference. There is just a little more flesh put upon articles 3 and 4.

Mr. Dykes: To reinforce my hon. Friend's point, does he agree that it is interesting to see in the text for the other member states that the word "legal" stands before the word "agreement"? The word "legal" was taken out of the English text.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend is a great linguist, and we all surrender to him on that point. Simple fellow that I am, I have to restrict myself to the text that is written in the English language. I hope that my hon. Friend will therefore bear with me.

6.15 pm

Article 5 has no great significance. It relates to the Commission being able to put its views forward regarding co-operation. Article 6 is a politically correct article. It says:

"Each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work is applied."

That applies anyhow. It is part of the laws of Europe; it is part of the laws of the land. Article 7 has no great additional significance.

So what is the meat of the protocol? It is article 2, which says:

"the Community shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in the following fields:
—improvement . . . of the working environment".

That exists already in article 118A. We all know well that that exists. We are constantly getting legislation—some good, some bad—from the European Community regarding the working environment and also the health and safety of workers.

Secondly, article 2 refers to working conditions. It does not refer to the bettering of working conditions, or to the improvement of working conditions. I presume that it means that if Europe became desperately uncompetitive with the Pacific rim, the participants in the social protocol could sit down together and extend the working week, if they wanted to. That is what working conditions means. The article does not say that we should move in any particular direction. So who is concerned about that?

Article 2 also refers to

"the information and consultation of workers"

and to

"equality between men and women".

We already have that in article 6. The article refers also to "the integration of persons excluded from the labour market". Everybody, I believe, is in favour of the integration of persons excluded from the labour market. It may be that some enthusiasts in the European Community, with the Commission at the back of it—we are all a bit worried about the Commission—will come forward with ideas that are burdensome.

The article states that the Council may adopt directives. It does not say that it has to adopt directives. However, when the Council adopts those directives, it has to take account of the following sentence:

"Such directives shall avoid imposing administrative, financial and legal constraints in a way which would hold back the creation and development of small and medium-sized undertakings."

Anything that can be brought forward on this basis, even though it can be brought forward in certain restricted fields, most of which are already covered by article 118A, has to take account of the satisfactory development and the wealth and prosperity of medium-sized and small undertakings. Is that not something that is satisfactory from my right hon. Friend's point of view, from the Conservative Government's point of view, from the Cabinet's point of view? What are they concerned about?

If we look further down, we see that social security, termination of contracts, representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers—that is, trades union legislation—the conditions of employment of third country nationals and financial contributions for the promotion of employment and job creation is all to be done by unanimity. If my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Conservative Government do not like them, they can stop them. They have got a veto.

Anything that might be contentious on a party political basis, any of the things that we do not want but that the Labour party might want, the United Kingdom Government, if it were participating in the social protocol, would have the ability to control and prevent from going ahead.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Or anybody else.

Mr. Marlow: Indeed. As the hon. Gentleman says, it would be possible not only for us but for anybody else to do that. If an individual country in Europe wished to do so—if it regarded it as socially beneficial and not burdensome—it could pass its own legislation. But if we were participating in the social protocol, we could veto proposals that we thought would be burdensome for the United Kingdom and for Europe and prevent them from being implemented.

The final part of article 2 of the agreement on social policy states:

"The provisions of this Article shall not apply to pay, right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs."

A great deal of trade union legislation has been introduced since the Conservative Government came into power in 1979. I voted for it. I agree with it and am of the opinion that it has been of great benefit to this country; I know that Labour Members will disagree with that view. But that legislation, too, is safeguarded, so what are the problems?

I put it to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that Europe is changing. It is becoming less competitive. Massive cracks are opening up in the German economy and the Germans' ethos and their attitude to those problems is changing. They know that they have the highest priced work force, the highest on costs and some of the worst absenteeism in Europe—that the great German economic miracle stands balanced between further progress and potential disaster. Attitudes towards working conditions and social legislation in Germany may well be on the threshold of a major change.

Suppose that we do not participate in the social protocol. Ideas come forward. Germany may have second thoughts—from a Conservative point of view—about some of those ideas. The idea may be anathema to Labour Members—it may fill them with horror—but the Germans may not like what is proposed. If we are not there, they will be alone and the proposals will go through. The Germans will feel that they must show solidarity with the others; no one will be there to join them, to agree with them, to share their misgivings. Legislation will be implemented and will affect—in theory—11 member states.

Do we really believe that the other member states will allow it to stop at 11? We know what has happened with other legislation. We had safeguards in the Single European Act. Originally, all these great and important matters were to be decided by unanimity. They were not. A lot ot things—including the length of the working week—have been decided by majority voting. If Britain is not involved and if Britain's ideas are not in evidence, we shall have legislation under the social protocol—first for the other 11 member states and then for the United Kingdom—which we shall not have been able to influence. If we participated alongside the Germans—other people with more realistic views about the potentially damaging effects of social legislation on this scale at this stage, with the European economy going down and other economies in the world coming up—we might be able to mould and modify the legislation, not just for the benefit of the United Kingdom but for the benefit of the rest of Europe.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): This is a fascinating new spectacle. For the first time ever, the hon. Gentleman appears to be brimming with enthusiasm for the Maastricht treaty. It is wonderful to watch, but I am not clear that I follow his argument. Is the essence of his position that we should scrap the rest of the treaty and just pass the social chapter?

Mr. Marlow: The essence of my position is the same as the essence of the hon. Gentleman's position: it is that we should scrap the treaty. What I am saying is that we have had a totally bogus debate about the social chapter so far, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East said. The opt-out has been used as a virility symbol—good jungle stuff. We heard from my right hon. Friends what a great victory they had won for Britain in securing an opt-out from the social chapter and we heard from the

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Opposition how it would be the end of the world if we did not have the social chapter—our people would be victimised; their working conditions would be appalling; it would be back to Dickens if we did not sign. That is nonsense. If I have one plea to put to hon. Members it is that, before we return to the debate at a later stage, they should read the social protocol, take advice on it and understand it. Let us stop talking slogans and talk reality.

Today, through a combination of views and pressures and attitudes, we have changed the Bill before the House in such a way that I believe that it would be improper for the Government to go ahead with ratification. They know that there is no feeling of warmth, affection or commitment towards the Maastricht treaty in the country at large. They know that people are uneasy about it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East said, let us have some fresh thoughts. Let us put this mangled issue before the people of this country in straightforward terms in a referendum. Let us put the social protocol in front of the people of the country.

We do not have referendums on capital punishment. Who would pass the legislation if we did? But we can have a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. The questions can be simple: "Do you want Maastricht or do you not?"; "Are you prepared to make a decision on Maastricht?"; "Do you want the social protocol or do you not?" Those are simple questions with simple answers.

In this place, we use the powers of the people and if, from time to time in using those powers, we abuse those powers, we will get kicked out. If that happens, Labour will get in and put right what, in its view, we have done wrong. But if, by ratifying the treaty, we dispense with the powers of the people and pass them to institutions over which we have no control, we do something that we do not have the right to do. Those powers are not our powers to dispose of: they are the people's powers. Why not let the people choose?

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I think it was the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who said that this was, in many ways, a sad occasion and a sad reflection on our procedures and debates. Other hon. Members have commented on the length of time that has been spent discussing the social protocol and the agreement on social policy and discussing amendments Nos. 27 and 2. We have spent an awful lot of time discussing those issues. Until yesterday, the amendment was billed as or expected to be the crunch event in our discussion of the Bill—the one issue on which the Government would suffer a really important defeat. Today was to be the day on which everything happened. Yet now, at half-past six, the Benches are empty, people have gone away and nothing is happening. The whole thing has become a damp squib. That is indeed a sad reflection on our proceedings.

What has happened has been largely the result of the cumbersome way in which we proceed in ratifying treaties such as this. It would be much better if we had ratification processes similar to those adopted in other member states, where the legislature has to legislate in respect of all the terms of the treaty and where there can be proper debate on it. We do not have that opportunity. Instead, amendments have to be tabled to a Bill that refers to only part of the treaty. Then there is the difficulty of trying to frame them so that they will have a serious effect. The interest, time and trouble that we have taken over this issue would not have been taken had it not been for the view expressed by the Government and by other hon. Members that amendment No. 27 was important. That is why it became a headline issue. Later, different opinions were expressed about the effect of amendment No. 27 and subsequently the present amendment.

There has been speculation about the differences of opinion and the differences of legal opinion offered within the Government. We have had regrettably brief explanations by the Attorney-General and the Foreign Secretary of the revised opinions. We have not had—this is a serious omission—a full statement of the original opinion on which the Government acted and of the reasons for it.

People outside the House must look on our proceedings with amazement. It would be of benefit to them if they could see the full range of opinion that lay before us or if, even at this late hour, the Government could explain those opinions. That would help people outside to understand how the confusion arose, how conflicting opinions were given and how an amendment that was originally regarded as a killer, both in the House and in comments and briefings outside the House, has ended up a damp squib. It is not the first time that that has happened. Other amendments which were thought to involve major issues ended up as damp squibs. That has given rise to accusations by some hon. Members of a conspiracy between the two Front Benches so that one Front Bench could appear to oppose without frustrating the passage of the Bill. I do not know the truth. I always take the view that if there is a choice between a conspiracy theory and the alternative—I am not sure whether it is parliamentary to refer to a cock-up theory—one should prefer the latter unless there is real evidence to the contrary.

6.30 pm

As to the effect of amendment No. 27 and now amendment No. 2, we had an excellent speech by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) explaining in detail his views. I found much of what he said persuasive. I shall not go over the same ground in detail, but with the indulgence of the House I want to make some observations on my view of the position.

Two different matters are involved and it is easy for the language to slip between one and the other. There is the protocol on social policy and the agreement on social policy. The agreement is an agreement made by the other 11 members of the Community. It will not extend to the United Kingdom, nor will amendment No. 2 extend it. The protocol is separate from the agreement. The important point about the protocol is that it authorises the other 11 members, who entered into the agreement on social policy, to use the institutions of the Community for the purpose of carrying out the agreement. They need that permission. They cannot operate the agreement on social policy unless permission is granted by the United Kingdom. If the United Kingdom does not grant permission, the agreement on social policy will be frustrated.

The protocol also contains a provision about administrative costs, a point of considerable concern to some Conservative Members. An issue of principle is involved, but the amount is minor and there may be other

ways in which the expenditure can be justified legally and politically. I will leave the question of administrative costs to one side.

As I said, the important point about the protocol is that it authorises the other 11 member states to proceed. I understand why Liberal Members have said that, in substance, the agreement on social policy and the protocol are separate. There is merit in the argument that their subject matter marks them out from the rest of the treaty. If, for the sake of argument, there was a separate treaty, the question would arise whether the Government could give effect to that separate agreement and ratify it without legislation.

That brings in the argument of the Liberal party about section 6 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978. That section is ambiguous and I should not like to give a strong opinion about its effect. The argument of Liberal Members about the effect of section 6 is interesting. I suspect that the hon. Member for Dagenham is right, but it is for the courts to decide. I am prepared to assume that the Government could ratify an agreement on social policy and a protocol on social policy if they were in a separate document. To some extent, that supports the revised legal opinion given to the House by the Attorney-General and would appear to support the view that the adoption of amendment No. 2, which will occur later, would have no effect and that the Government could proceed to ratify.

However, we do not have a separate agreement. The agreement on social policy and the protocol are in the treaty on European union. If Parliament decides that the protocol should not be endorsed, and by doing so clearly expresses the view that the Government should not authorise the other 11 member states to use the institutions of the Community, can or should the Government proceed? That is the kernel of the issue.

Perhaps—I emphasise "perhaps"—on a narrow legal view the Government can proceed to ratify the treaty after the adoption of amendment No. 2, but is it constitutional for them to do so? There is a difference between what is legal and what is constitutional. It stems from the nature of our not clearly defined and evolving constitution. It would be against the spirit of the modern British constitution for the Executive to ignore the formally stated view of Parliament. The arguments of the hon. Member for Dagenham on that point are extremely persuasive.

It would be unconstitutional for the Government to ratify the treaty after Parliament has expressed, as it probably will later, the view that the protocol on social policy should not be endorsed. If the Government proceed on that basis they will be changing constitutional practice. I appeal to them to think carefully before creating an important precedent and departing not only from practice but from what arguably would be constitutionally proper. What has arisen as a result of the Government's decision throws up a serious issue.

One cannot be certain, largely for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Dagenham, but I suspect that there is potential for disparity between United Kingdom law, as it will be if the Bill, as amended, is passed, and the position as stated in the treaty. If there were not potential for disparity, the Bill would never have been drafted as it was. Without being able to identify where the disparity would be between United Kingdom law and the law of the Community, I suspect that there will be disparity.

If there is disparity, the best way to proceed is as the Government originally intended—by including a reference to the protocol in the Bill. By accepting amendment No. 2 and removing the protocol on social policy, the Government are taking the second-best way. They will be all right until the disparity between the United Kingdom law and Community law is apparent, when they will be in serious trouble because they will be out of step with Community law and they will have to come back to Parliament to pass new legislation.

It is not a good way of proceeding, but it is interesting to note that there is a precedent for the Government to behave in precisely that way. I shall mention it briefly because it involves Northern Ireland legislation, in particular the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947, passed by the Stormont Parliament. Before it was passed, the Law Officers of the Crown in Northern Ireland, including Lord MacDermott and the father of the former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, William Lowry, advised the Northern Ireland Government and Her Majesty's Government in London that the legislation was ultra vires the powers of the Northern Ireland Parliament. Their advice was not published at the time; it became available only 30 years later. We now know that they had good and solid reasons for believing the legislation to be unconstitutional. The attitude of Her Majesty's Government was, "Go ahead, legislate, and if you get into trouble later we will repair the damage by passing legislation at Westminster to rescue you."

The Government have adopted a cavalier attitude to the ratification of the treaty. By accepting amendment No. 2, they have been forced into the position in which there is potentially a conflict between United Kingdom law and Community law. However, they accept that danger to get through today's crisis—to avoid the issue today. They will wait until the crisis comes back tomorrow, next month, next year or whenever and then come back. It may not be them: it may be someone else because people may have been reshuffled or moved on since then. That is a bad way to proceed. As the hon. Member for Southend, East said, what is happening today is a sad reflection on the House.

I said at the outset that I hope the Government will have the opportunity to put into the public domain the original legal advice that they received from the lawyers in the Foreign Office and a detailed statement, not the short, almost contemptuous statements that we have had from the Foreign Secretary and the Attorney-General. It occurs to me that that material, advice and information will probably be in the public domain soon, despite the Government.

The hon. Member for Dagenham wondered whether it would be possible to go to the United Kingdom court to seek a judicial review of an Act of Parliament. He is right to wonder because such action would create other precedents. It would be an interesting way to proceed. Of course, it is not necessary to do that. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the question of locus standi is not a serious problem. It will be easy for people to seek a declaration that, in the light of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill as amended today, it will be unlawful or improper for the Government to proceed to ratify the treaty on European union. If people proceed to seek a declaration on that basis, one will move for discovery. On discovery, I am sure that a whole range of interesting material will come out of the Foreign Office and elsewhere.

Perhaps it is appropriate to get the shredders going before too much more time has elapsed on this issue—they may already be at work. An interesting issue will arise.

The serious point underlying all this is that the Government will proceed in the way in which they said they want to—they will accept amendment No. 2 and thus have all of Parliament, in a deliberate and formal Act, say that it does not approve of the protocol on social policy and, consequently, does not think that Her Majesty's Government should authorise the other 11 member states to proceed to use the institutions of the Community for the purposes of the protocol. If they say that they will ignore the formal and unanimous statement of the House and rely on the strict letter of the law as they see it, it will be a bad day for the House and the British constitution. There are those who say that the whole operation of enacting the Bill will be a bad day for the British constitution.

Mr. Maclennan: Earlier, the hon. Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) spoke with feeling and great conviction about the significance of the Bill and amendment No. 2. They are right to recognise, in a way that the Government have never allowed, that we are engaged in a significant matter. It is not about elegance in parliamentary drafting or tidiness: it is about what will appear on the face of an Act of Parliament and the consequences of that. Neither the Foreign Secretary nor the Attorney-General has been candid about that matter at any stage of the proceedings on this Bill.

It is a matter of great regret that, in consideration of amendment No. 27 and in today's debate, responsible Ministers have paid such cursory attention to the legal effects of what we are seeking to do and what, apparently, as a result of the volte face by the Government, we shall do without dissension as a result of their acceptance of amendment No. 2. The hon. Member for Southend, East, whom I have known for a long time in the House, must not exaggerate the pressures that were put on him and other Conservative Members to kowtow to the Government's interpretation. That pressure does not stem from a matter of elegance of drafting because some course of action is preferable but not necessary—the Government took the view that what we are doing today is not simply preferable but necessary to achieve their purpose of the proper ratification of not only the Maastricht treaty but the social protocol.

6.45 pm

Why did the Government take that view, which they appear to be prepared to jettison today? Why is there that great inconsistency? Throughout the Maastricht process, the Government have talked with two voices. On the one hand, they have tried to convey the impression to the other member countries of the European Community that we were going along step by step with the development of the European union. On the other hand, they preferred not to emphasise that step-by-step approach to the British public but to trumpet a nationalistic rejection of the development of the European union. As evidence of that, they have produced the elements of the agreement, especially the provisions relating to the social chapter, that could be held up as evidence of Britain going it alone.

The operation was always a two-faced one. It backfired badly on the Government not only today when the Foreign Secretary was faced with an intervention from the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) that put him on the spot and that he was unable to answer. If the matter was so massively important, as it had been declared earlier, why did the Foreign Secretary shrug it off today? The Foreign Secretary shrugged off not only that difficulty but a much more serious difficulty for the Government that flowed from the reaction of other member countries of the Community to what had been done in Maastricht. If the Government had been straightforward about the matter instead of covering up what was going on, it is probable that the Danes, in their referendum, would have come to a different decision. They would have felt not that Britain had pulled a fast one on them and got some sort of separate advantage but that it was proper and appropriate to move in step with the other 11 member countries of the Community.

That has not been done without cost to the United Kingdom—it has certainly not been done without cost to the European Community. It has led to this Parliament having to debate the matter for months in ways that have forced other items off the agenda and that have led to the bafflement of the wider public because the Government have been so lacking in candour about what they are doing.

Mr. Spearing: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is another possible explanation for the lack of candour? I am not sure whether it also applies to his party. I do not believe so, but it certainly applies to the Government. Is it not possible that if the Government had been candid about the nature of the treaty and of the European union for which the hon. Gentleman is an enthusiast and for which he speaks, there would have been such a strong reaction inside the Conservative party and an even stronger reaction in the country that people would have said, "No. Up with this we will not put."?

The same may well have happened in Denmark. It may happen again. It is an open secret that the Government of Denmark are trying to get something through, just as the British Government are trying to do. They knew that if they were candid, they probably would not do it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, may I point out that this is not a Second or Third Reading debate. We are debating amendments. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recall that.

Mr. Maclennan: If you are referring to my remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, of course I will endeavour to recall that. I thought that I was closely following the impact of the amendment. The intervention may have widened the issue way beyond what I had in mind. For that reason, perhaps I shall not follow what the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said. *[Laughter.]* If the hon. Gentleman provokes me, I will answer.

I do not believe that the British community would have rejected the treaty simply because the hon. Gentleman's view of what had been done had been trumpeted. When the Bill was first voted upon, the House accepted it overwhelmingly. I believe that the country would have accepted it overwhelmingly if the Government had been much more straightforward about what they were doing.

We must consider the effect of what the Government have accepted in amendment No. 2. It appears to me that at best they have thrown considerable doubt on the effectiveness of our ratification of the social protocol. I

doubt whether the amendment will result in the defeat of the ratification process of the treaty, for, as I read it, the treaty and the protocol are related but distinct legal instruments.

Furthermore, it is right to recall that the Maastricht treaty provides that it must be ratified by the high contracting parties

"in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

I put it to the House that the respective constitutional requirements for both the treaty and the social protocol are that they be approved by the House. That is because of the provisions of section 6 of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978.

When I put that point to the Foreign Secretary, he—apparently relying on something that had been quickly whispered in his left ear by the Attorney-General—said that it was taken care of by clause 1(2) of the Bill. I am bound to say that it is not clear from any fair-minded and objective reading of clause 1(2) that that is so. The clause refers to the treaty. It certainly does not refer to the protocol. It may be argued that the treaty includes the protocol. But that argument will not be so easy to sustain following the passing of amendment No. 2 this afternoon.

Clause 1(1) will now explicitly exclude the protocol and make it clear that within the four corners of the legislation a distinction is drawn between the treaty and the protocol. Of course, that argument only goes to reinforce the view that may fairly be arrived at from the language of the protocol, which provides that it and the agreement on social policy are

"without prejudice to the provisions of this Treaty".

It appears to me that the protocol regards the treaty as separate and that the treaty and the protocol are two international instruments separately signed, separately debated and separately agreed. They are related in subject matter, but they are distinct international agreements. They are both subject to our constitutional requirements.

I put it no stronger than this. The Government have created great uncertainty about whether we are in a position to ratify the social protocol. It is well known that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I do not wish to see the social protocol ratified. We do not wish to be out of step with the legislative measures in force in the European Community for the protection of the interest of our people, however that may be defined.

I wholly accept the view expressed by the hon. Member for Northampton, North in his impassioned speech that, when such matters are discussed in Europe, it is exceedingly important that the British Government are represented. The matter affects our vital national interests. The exclusion of our voice from the debate can, by no stretch of the imagination, be regarded as in the interests of Britain.

How will the matter be resolved? The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and several others have speculated that perhaps the matter will come before our domestic courts fairly soon and said that it should. I do not know precisely what they have in mind. I heard what the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said about seeking a declaration. It may be a little more difficult than has been anticipated to have the matter considered by our domestic courts.

Although I know that, proceeding by originating summonses, the courts may feel that it is appropriate not to test too carefully the question of locus standi and to take a broad view, I should have thought that it would be necessary to show that one had some interest in the courts' finding before such a test could be made. I do not doubt that the matter could come before the European Court if any step were taken by the other 11 members of the Community on the basis of the social agreement which was seen by any citizen of Britain to be adverse to our country's interest and to our citizens' individual interests.

At the European Court we would have an undoubted right to challenge the effectiveness of what was being done and to test whether we had properly ratified. Indeed, we could test whether the other 11 members of the Community could enact anything under the provisions of an agreement which had not been properly ratified by one of the member states.

It may be called into question whether the social protocol falls as a result of the decision taken by the House of Commons today. It is a matter of speculation whether such doubt can exist in the minds of senior legal counsel in this country. It undoubtedly was in the mind of the Foreign Office legal adviser, Mr. Frank Berman, when he gave the advice on which the Government originally relied before the Attorney-General came up with his convenient alternative when he discovered that the Government did not have a majority on the matter.

The way in which the Government have proceeded is unsatisfactory. It is not only politically damaging to Britain's interests but creates continuing legal uncertainty within the European Community. In our view, the only proper way to resolve the matter is to take it back to an intergovernmental meeting as soon as possible and for the Government to say that they are prepared to withdraw from the position which they have taken hitherto of opposition to the social agreement, which has commended itself to all the other 11 member countries of the Community. I hope that that is the action that they will take, but it remains to be seen, because we have heard very little from the Government today on what they intend to do as a result of this. They tried to pretend that it was simply a matter of drafting elegance, but this is a threadbare argument that carries no conviction at all.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The statement of surrender that we heard from the Foreign Secretary regarding the Government's intention on amendment No. 2 poses fundamental issues for the House, many of which have been elaborated by other right hon. and hon. Members, and it is not my intention to repeat them. Suffice it to say that the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) about the Government's attitude was absolutely right and unanswerable.

The dramatic change that has come about as a result of the Government's acceptance of amendment No. 2, from the position where the social chapter opt-out was absolutely crucial to the position where it had no importance, cannot by any stretch of the imagination warrant the term "credible". Why have we seen this humiliating climb-down? I suspect that the Government decided that a climb-down would be marginally less humiliating for them than an outright defeat. In other words, out of a sense of panic they were looking for a bolthole in which they could ensure their survival.

7 pm

I want to make a point to those who argue that there are really no legal problems to worry about as a result of acceptance of amendment No. 2. The Attorney-General has advised us that there are no legal problems, but removing the opt-out leaves many questions. If we are to remove the opt-out to the social chapter, as is the case, who will decide what is the position with regard to that social chapter and to social policy within the United Kingdom? Someone will have to decide. The Government seem unable or unwilling to take a positive or definitive view on this, so who will decide? It will be the courts, either in this country, or, more likely, the European Court.

So because the Government are apparently prepared to ignore what we are sure will be the clear wish of the House and of Parliament, in relation to the social protocol opt-out and in an attempt to save some shred of their tattered credibility, they seem content to take the view that they can hide behind the skirts of the courts, which will sort things out if the Government are not prepared to—hardly an example of decisive government or of being at the heart of Europe. However, this appears to be the attitude that the Government are prepared to take and it is a direct result of the inept handling of the whole situation by the Government, together with their apparent willingness to deny what we are sure will be the clear authority and decision of the House.

The Government could take a positive attitude. They could say that since the House of Commons has made its intentions known, they will reverse their attitude and their policy and accept the full-blown social chapter and social policy of the European Community. There is no indication whatever from the Government Front Bench that they intend to do that. What we face here is another historic miscalculation by the Government.

There is a second important miscalculation that I wish to highlight. The Prime Minister, no less, has argued consistently in the House and elsewhere that the social chapter opt-out is vital—not important, vital—for United Kingdom interests and economic competitiveness. But I believe that as a result of what has happened the European Community will scrutinise the Government's position carefully. The other members of the European Community may be prepared grudgingly to acquiesce in a short-term opt-out so that they can have a political deal on Maastricht and so that they can stitch up an agreement. I suggest, however, that what the European Community will not tolerate is the House removing the opt-out of the social chapter and the United Kingdom continuing to act as if the opt-out was still there. Member countries will not accept that the United Kingdom can have it both ways.

There may be challenges in the courts of this country and perhaps in the European Court, but I am pretty sure that the other member states will not tolerate a situation where the United Kingdom Government, for the sake of sheer expediency, see fit to take these measures in an attempt to have their cake and eat it, and try to operate as though the social policies in the other member states will go ahead but the social policy in this country will not, even though the House of Commons has removed the opt-out to the social chapter.

The Government may continue to seek this because they believe that it gives us a competitive advantage if what we have so often heard described as the burdens of the social protocol are not imposed on British business and industry. Many of us simply do not accept that, but it has been the basis of the Government's argument. The opt-out will have no support in Parliament and it will simply not be accepted as a credible position in the Community. I can safely predict that it will not be tolerated.

I argue strongly that those who seek to support the Maastricht Bill on Third Reading, given the situation that we are now facing and given the fundamental issues raised in the debate this afternoon, will do European progress and integration no service whatever. If the Maastricht Bill is accepted on Third Reading, there will, because of actions taken as a result of the present position, be severe delay and it could even result in the ultimate destruction of the process begun at Maastricht.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move amendment No. 46, in page 2, line 1, after 'Article 2', insert 'of the Treaty establishing the European Community'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 47, in clause 3, page 2, line 4, leave out from first 'of' to 'and' in line 5 and insert 'the Treaty establishing the European Community'.

No. 48, in clause 4, page 2, line 10, leave out from second 'of' to 'information' in line 11 and insert 'the Treaty establishing the European Community'.

Mr. Smith: The purpose of the amendments is simply to bring the language into conformity with the references to the treaty made elsewhere in the Bill.

I am moving the amendments because they amend the successful amendments to the Bill which the Labour party has already had accepted. By the end of our deliberations on the Bill we will have rewritten around two thirds of it, a considerable achievement for the Opposition.

Mr. Spearing: Had I known two hours ago that I would be speaking on what appear to be, and probably are, procedural amendments, I would have been surprised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) knows, the amendments relate, indirectly, to a number of questions which I hope the Financial Secretary will be able to answer. It is a pity that the Attorney-General has fled the Chamber because the issues are much more in his line than that of anybody else.

As my hon. Friend said, amendments Nos. 46, 47 and 48 respectively refer to clause 2, which deals with the change from stage 2 to stage 3 of economic monetary union; clause 3, which relates to a report by the Bank of England; and clause 4, which deals with information for the Commission.

When one looks at clause 2 it is obvious that, without the insertion

"of the Treaty establishing the European Community"

an anomaly would be created because it might be thought that article 2, as mentioned in the clause, referred to the article of the treaty on European union, to which the whole Bill is consequential.

I noted that the amendments tabled to clauses 3 and 4 did not follow, so I made some inquiries as to why the articles referred to in clauses 3 and 4 did not appear to match up with the text of the treaties that we have before us. Those inquiries produced, at first sight, a simple answer

—that the treaty establishing the European Communities will be the continuing title of the consolidated treaty that will result from the marriage of the existing treaty establishing the communities, popularly known as "Rome", with the treaty establishing a European union, popularly known as "Maastricht". This is a mystery because the Government were requested on many occasions, both in writing before the presentation of the Bill and in Committee, to print and distribute the consolidated treaty as it is designed to emerge. In other words, we have before us two treaties which will be pushed into one. The Government have persistently and consistently declined to meet that request. A number of hon. Members were surprised by this because, since the Government are committed to public information, we wanted to see the treaties as they will be once the Act is passed and assuming that those treaties are ratified. Only an ingenious, private entrepreneur produced such a volume. It has not been referred to in the course of the debate because, quite rightly, we have been using the HMSO version of both treaties.

A question arises as to what will happen given ratification and the production of the third or fourth treaty —whatever number one would like to give it—which has no name but is now being named precisely by the amendments. I cannot understand why that specific title has been chosen. At the present time the treaty establishing the European Economic Communities is that signed originally at Rome—the present version is Cm 455—and it will be amended. I assumed that the treaty, as amended, would have some other title—perhaps the "Treaty on European Union and the Communities"—but no, it appears that on advice, which I have no doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East and other hon. Friends have taken, it will be called, quite simply, in the words of the amendment,

"the Treaty establishing the European Community".

How can that be when, for months, we have been discussing a treaty on European union? It is bad that a Foreign Office Minister is not on the Front Bench, or somewhere handy, for this penultimate debate of the important Report stage.

The Foreign Secretary has said time and time again that two great edifices are involved; that we are beefing up the European Communities—that is the core of the Bill—and we will have some intergovernmental pillars, that is, the union. The Foreign Secretary—I am sorry he is not here —has been peddling this week after week, month after month. Some of us have said that, in practice, we will end up with the same, original edifice. We have also said, further, that the Community will enlarge into something much bigger than we were used to in the old Common Market and the old Community; it will be a union that takes on most of the characteristics of a nation. "Oh no", the Government said, "It will not be like that at all." But we have two parts to the treaty: we have titles II, III and IV which under articles G, H and I, will clearly create a beefed-up "Rome" and, indeed, establish the European Communities. But those communities are within and part of what will be the intergovernmental union. The articles of the treaty which relate to that—I refer to the treaty on the union—are titles I, V, VI and VII. They comprise all the articles A to F, inclusive, and J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R and S.

As a result of the drafting of the treaty signed at Maastricht it is clear that we will have a single, consolidated treaty. The amendments, however, tabled as a result of good advice, will result in the treaty being called "the Treaty establishing the European Community". Clearly, as those of us who have been here in the past weeks know, that is not a correct title. It is a treaty that will establish European union within which there will be an inner core of the European Community—and that comes straight out of the mouth of the Foreign Secretary and his Foreign Office colleagues, who are not here. How can it properly have such a title when it will establish that union? As some of my hon. Friends and I have already said, that union will be a much bigger and more important entity than the communities inside it.

The Minister on duty in the Chamber is from the Treasury. What is the House coming to when we have an important treaty before us and the Foreign Office is not represented? What are the Secretary of State for Health, the Financial Secretary and two other members of the Cabinet doing here, trying to answer for the Foreign Secretary and his Minister of State? Those right hon. Gentlemen are in enough trouble already, having had to climb down from their respective positions.

What will be the name of the final treaty? Will it take the title of the Bill or that offered in the amendments? If it takes its title from the amendments, it will be inaccurate; if not, will the Government table further amendments in another place to give the accurate name of the treaty? Why was it that the Government would not print the consolidated treaty so that it could be laid before the public and the House before we embarked upon our deliberations on the Bill? Were the Government being open with the public and the House? Are they being open with the House by tabling such amendments, or rather suggesting to my hon. Friends that they should regularise their own amendments?

The Financial Secretary is now, I believe, able to shed some light on this. I appreciate his difficult position, but I am also aware that the Government have mishandled this matter, because in this penultimate debate on the Bill no member of the Foreign Office or the Cabinet is present who could answer what I believe to be some important questions.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I am happy to accept the amendment. It was odd to hear the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) claim credit for more than half—indeed, he mentioned two thirds—of the words in the Bill, as amended, as having been written by the Opposition. The Government are normally, in the legislative process, under criticism for prolixity. It is a happy state of affairs when I can return the charge to the Opposition Benches. We regard the amendments as an improvement to the Bill and I am happy to accept them.

I admire the extent to which the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) can build a conspiracy into the title that is put over the treaty. The answer to his question is straightforward and it is made clear by the description of the purposes of the different titles contained in the table of contents in the published version of the Bill. That explains that titles II, III and IV are, as their name implies, titles which amend the treaties that established the European Communities, while titles I, V, VI and, to a large measure, VII, are a treaty that was signed at Maastricht

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

—with force in its own right under international law—and do not aspire to amend the treaties that established the European Community.

Two separate things were done at Maastricht, one of which involves the amendment of the treaties establishing the Communities, the other of which involves the establishment of the pillars on which the Minister of State rightly placed considerable stress during the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for the Minister's description and perhaps I was a little hard, although hopefully not conspiratorial. Matters are totally different for those who know the answers from the start compared with those who are discovering them only as we go along.

Is he suggesting that we shall have two treaties? Will there be the central titles, II, III and IV, to which he referred as the treaty creating the Economic Communities, as amended by the amendments made at Maastricht, as one treaty, plus another called the treaty on European union comprised of titles I, V, VI and VII and the other lettered articles to which I referred? That might make some sense, although it would mean two volumes of treaties rather than one. If there is one, it cannot be given two titles, particularly as the central part is sandwiched between two thick slices of bread on the outside.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a semantic argument which is not getting the House far. We have signed a succession of treaties, the effect of part of one of which—that is, the treaty of Maastricht—is to amend the terms of earlier treaties signed at Rome and other places. The effect is made clear by the textual development contained in the terms of the relevant treaties as they were signed.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

ANNUAL REPORT BY BANK OF ENGLAND.

Amendment made: No. 47, in page 2, line 4, leave out from first 'of' to 'and' in line 5 insert

'the Treaty establishing the European Community'.—*[Mr. Andrew Smith.]*

Mr. Dorrell: I beg to move amendment No. 44, in page 2, line 8, leave out 'the Commons' and insert 'each'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I suggest that it would be convenient for the House to discuss at the same time Government amendment No. 45.

Mr. Dorrell: The effect of amendment No. 44 is to amend clause 3, which was accepted by the Government in Committee. Clause 3, the House will remember, was originally new clause 1 in Committee. It provides an opportunity for the House to consider and vote on the report submitted by the Governor of the Bank of England on the work of the European system of central banks.

The clause as drafted provides that that vote shall take place only in this House. It is conventional that when votes are called for on free-standing resolutions in one House, the same opportunity is provided to the other House. The only normal exception to that process arises in the context of supply procedures. The new clause does not relate to supply procedures and the Government think it would be appropriate to afford a similar opportunity to another place to have a vote on the subject contained in clause 3 of the Bill, as amended.

Mr. George Robertson: These amendments are not as simple and uncontroversial as the otherwise plausible Financial Secretary would have the House believe, and I will explain why. Earlier today, the Government accepted amendment No. 2, and Ministers have been perambulating around television studios telling the world that it did not matter, that what happened was of no great consequence and that the protocol should not have been there in the first place.

It is as though the Foreign Secretary was holding a grenade in his hand and this afternoon it went off. He wiggles his hand about saying, "I did not need that hand, anyway." The Government are trying by their generosity to tell the British people that what happened was of no real consequence, and in the amendments now before the House they are at it again.

Amendment No. 44 would, says the Financial Secretary, simply give the other House the right to debate the report of the Governor of the Bank of England and an opportunity, equal to that of this House, to vote on that report. Clause 3 is historic. This is the first time in British history that the Governor of the Bank of England will be required to report to this House. Not only is that a first, but the Government have accepted a provision that will oblige Parliament to have a vote on the Governor's report. Clearly, it is not an insignificant feature.

As the Financial Secretary points out, the normal exception to the convention in this House on measures that are considered by one House and not by the other is in relation to finance. He uses the word "supply," but we know that that relates to finance, and there is a good and proper tradition for that. We are talking of a report by the Governor of the Bank of England to Parliament on questions of finance and the discharge of his responsibilities in relation to economic and monetary union and the European central bank.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is making an important mistake. The principles of supply would remain unaffected by the treaty. The responsibilities of the Governor concern monetary policy, and if we move to stage 3 of the treaty, any vote on monetary policy will be governed by the standard procedures of the House and will not be part of supply.

Mr. Robertson: The last time I was accused of making an important mistake was when the Minister of State told me that my amendment, then called amendment No. 27, would wreck the Maastricht treaty. So I treat the authoritative words of a Treasury Minister with a degree of scepticism.

Although the Minister talks of the precise details of the convention, the fact remains that we are concerned with monetary policy and the discharge of the responsibilities of the Governor of the Bank of England in relation to the European system of central banks. So it should remain, as a matter of principle, in the province of the House of Commons and not necessarily the House of Lords. Accordingly, I recommend my hon. Friends to oppose amendment No. 44.

Amendment No. 45 is linked with that amendment and, as a Government amendment, will be put to a vote. It, too, looks simple, equating the responsibilities of the House of

Commons and the House of Lords. When we get to the vote arising out of what was known as new clause 74, it will be the final cliffhanger vote of the whole ratification procedure which, perhaps unfortunately, I described as a ticking bomb. My description may have been unfortunate, not because it will explode in the Government's face but because such explosive similes are not in the best taste, especially in recent times.

We are being told that that process will prevent a Lords amendment from returning to the House. Hon. Members have been told, sotto voce through the usual channels, "It is simply George seeing shadows." It is said that I, of all people, want to detain the House further to consider Lords amendments before ratification. If there is any one person in the House of Commons who does not intend to detain the House for any longer than necessary on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, it is me. It is absurd to suggest otherwise.

7.30 pm

The Government's intentions are clear. The Bill now provides for a vote in the House of Commons that will take place—as the Foreign Secretary said—between Royal Assent on the ratification Bill and the actual ratification and notification of ratification. That is simple and straightforward—this afternoon the Foreign Secretary laid it on the line for Conservative rebels and told them what they would be voting for. I have made it clear in a previous debate that the amendment—to whichever motion the Government table—will explicitly refuse the Government the right to send the articles of ratification to Rome until they have signed the social chapter.

If the Tory rebels care to believe the Chancellor of the Exchequer—who said in the Budget debate that we would never sign the social chapter—they can vote with us in the knowledge that the amendment will wreck the Maastricht treaty. It will stop it in its tracks, not just for this country but for the whole of Europe. I hold the contrary view and believe that the Government would not dream of taking the country into the wilderness which that would represent by destroying the treaty for everyone. However, that will be the issue on that vote.

Now, the Government are saying that the House of Lords will have an equal right to vote. Is the Minister of State to be allowed to reply to the debate? The Government do not usually allow the Minister of State to open or reply to debates any longer—he is to resign the moment that our proceedings are over. However, if he is allowed to reply, I should like him to answer a simple question for the House: what happens if the House of Commons votes for our amendment and the House of Lords does not? What will happen at the end of the ratification process? What would the constitutional position be? There is nothing in the constitution of the United Kingdom or in "Erskine May" to deal with such a situation. We shall be moving from a relatively straightforward position—with the House able to make a decision on whether to ratify a treaty that does not include the social chapter—to one that places the Government in the dilemma of having to sign the social chapter or walk away from the treaty. Therefore, I recommend that, when we come to it, my hon. Friends should vote against amendment No. 45.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is not there a double lock in that both Houses have to approve the measure? I am sure that it will not be a problem—it is a double lock or additional safeguard.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor) usually sees more conspiracies and ghosts than even I do. However, my considered view is that the Government are trying to avoid the House of Commons having to come to a conclusive decision on the issue. Anyone who has watched the Government meandering around the labyrinth that my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) described so eloquently earlier will come to the same conclusion as I have, rather than any other more generous conclusion. I believe that, when we reach it, the House should vote against amendment No. 45.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 256.

Division No. 257] **[7.33 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl

Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David

Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 4

Information for Commission

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 2, line 10, leave out from second 'of' to 'information' in line 11 and insert 'the Treaty establishing the European Community'.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Clause 5

Commencement (Protocol on Social Policy)

Amendment proposed: No. 45, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'the House of Commons' and insert 'each House of Parliament'.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 264.

Division No. 258] **[7.47 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John

Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Debt-collecting Agencies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

8 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I am delighted to be able to speak to my Adjournment debate at such an early hour of the evening, and not much later as I had originally anticipated. I am also delighted to see the Paymaster General in his place. The issue that I want to raise concerns the Government's employment of private bailiffs for the purpose of debt collection. The number of bailiffs and the companies that they represent have mushroomed during the recession. My aim is to expose some of the difficulties and injustices and to urge the Government to respond positively to them.

As a starting point, I concede that some of the problems that I am about to detail also arise when local authorities employ private bailiffs to collect business rates or other debts. I shall rely heavily on investigative journalism, namely, the investigations carried out by HTV, the results of which were contained in its "Wales This Week" programme on 25 February. I want to pay a well-deserved tribute to the quality of the work done by the members of the HTV team—especially Chris Segar, the interviewer—for their commitment to revealing what, in my judgment, should be a major cause of public concern.

I accept the case for bailiffs—someone has to carry out work that is, by its very nature, distasteful because of its effects on both individuals and business people, who try, often against the odds, to keep their businesses afloat.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): My hon. Friend is fortunate to have such a long time for his Adjournment debate. In referring to business people, he is surely talking about small businesses that find themselves in difficulty. The big fry always seem to get away with everything. I doubt whether my hon. Friend will say anything about bailiffs going to get money from Asil Nadir—a man heavily in debt not only to businesses, but to the Tory party. It is a shame that my hon. Friend cannot say tonight that bailiffs were sent round to Nadir's place before he flew out of the country.

Mr. Anderson: My hon. Friend raises a new dimension. I think of the words of Ernest Bevin, "When you open the Pandora's box all sorts of Trojan horses come out." Much as I am tempted to go down the path suggested by my hon. Friend, I shall instead confine myself to talking about a number of small businesses that have suffered through the operations of private bailiffs.

I readily concede that enforcement can be effective only if there are sanctions. I accept that whenever there is a forced sale the financial returns, simply by the very nature of the transaction, inevitably will be lower than they would have been in a normal market sale. However, I submit that the HTV revelations show that the public interest and the interest of the debtor are frequently overridden in practice.

The Government should not seek to evade responsibility for the effect of the actions of their agents. After all, Customs and Excise and other Government Departments employ people, who act in the name of the Government, to collect debts that are due and owing to the Government. The Government's responsibility should not end at the point when they put enforcement in the hands of agents and delegate certain functions to them.

[Mr. Anderson]

The HTV revelations show that, in some cases, the Government's agents sell distrained goods down back alleys, in shady places, at ridiculous prices. The public interest is not served, the interests of the debtors are not served and, indeed, the interests of the Government are not served by that practice because the return to, for example, Customs and Excise is very small indeed. The only individuals who benefit from such transactions are the several agents at the points of distrainment, removal and auction. The practice has the makings of a scandal and I urge the Government to investigate and to take appropriate action.

The HTV programme focused on three cases, which I shall use only as examples. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) in his place because the first case relates to a late constituent of his. It is a tragic case involving John Herbert of Abergavenny, a local family business well known in the area, which had existed almost from the start of the century. Mr. Herbert shot himself in February when agents acting on behalf of Torfaen borough council stripped his furniture store because he owed business rates of £33,000.

As a result of that distrainment, five people are out of work and a family business of longstanding and repute which, alas, had over-extended itself during the recession, has closed. Clearly, I cannot comment on whether the local authority acted responsibly and used its discretion properly, but the tragic results are clear. There is some evidence that in this case, and, more particularly, in the other two cases to which I shall refer, the details of the sale were not properly advertised.

The second and third cases raised in the HTV programme are relevant to the enforcement operation by Customs and Excise for VAT debts. The second case is that of Peter Morgan of Swansea, builders' merchants, who owed £33,000 in VAT. A warrant for distrainment was signed by a VAT official and bailiffs distrained goods of a retail value of £67,000. The debtor took a careful inventory of the goods that had been taken and alleges that the bailiffs handled the goods roughly and took only a rough-and-ready inventory of the goods. Those goods, with a retail value of £67,000, realised only £2,000 at auction. Of that, Customs and Excise was paid £900. Peter Morgan's debt remains. The prices realised at the auction were astonishingly low. For example, 250 doors were sold for a total price of £1.

Tim Jones, a local solicitor of some standing in the City, gave impressive evidence to the HTV programme. The advertisement for the auction gave no address for it, only the name Roach and Company, and it gave no details of the nature of the goods to be auctioned, so the ordinary member of the public, interested in builders' materials or do-it-yourself for the home, would not have been attracted to the sale.

The auction was carried out by a body called Revenue Collection Services, which the solicitor could not trace in the Registrar of Companies or contact by telephone. The programme illustrated an attempt by its producers to contact the company with only a mobile phone number. Clearly, there was hardly any attempt by those responsible for the auction to advertise it to the general public.

The third case is that of Richard Jenkins of Swansea who owned a small business. That business owed £3,000 in VAT to the Customs and Excise and business rates of roughly £20,000. It claimed that it had sought to pay by instalments but had been refused. The majority of the stock was taken and, again, roughly handled into a van. The business said that the retail value of the stock taken was £40,000 and, again, roughly only £2,000 was realised. From that £2,000, £580 was paid for the removals.

The family of Richard Jenkins of Swansea discovered by chance that the auction was to take place in a seedy back street of Cardiff. Of particular interest is the fact that the family, having learnt the location of the auction, attended it and recognised the bailiffs who had taken the goods. They say that few members of the public, if any, were present. Clearly, in those circumstances, the goods were unlikely to obtain the best price.

The family also allege that the bailiffs were clearly well known to the auctioneer. In between sales, there were a number of conversations between the bailiffs and the auctioneer. The auction took place at the premises of RCS, which is linked to the bailiffs, being the holding company of the bailiffs, Roach and Company. Again, the solicitor, Mr. Tim Jones, could not trace the company at Companies House.

There is a chain from the bailiffs, through to the removal people and the auctioneers, showing the clear dangers of a cosy and possibly corrupt relationship between each link, potentially acting against the public interest.

Revenue Collection Services, or a similar name, was found by the programme compilers at the premises of Roach and Company in Bristol. The managing director was photographed at the auction, which was attended by the programme compilers. There must clearly be a suspicion that the company was exposing and exploiting the looseness of the present controls on the Government agents in this respect.

What points arise from those cases? First, there is the danger of an interrelationship between each link in the chain. Clearly, far from being secret, the auctions should be properly advertised so that members of the general public who wish to attend can do so. It may be too that a reserve price should be set as 250 doors should not be sold for £1.

It is questionable whether those irresponsible—in the full sense of the word—agents are serving the public interest. There are clearly substantial risks of corruption when there is a total lack of monitoring by the Government or any other agency of what is done in such cases.

I shall submit later that the dangers are aggravated by the new privatisation proposals for Customs and Excise. There is no complaints procedure, no investigation procedure and no appeal procedure to investigate the behaviour of agents acting on behalf of their principals —in this case the Customs and Excise.

I am glad that there is evidence that the Government recognise some of the problems that have arisen, but they are extremely slow to respond. I read with interest the consultation document published by the Lord Chancellor's Department in August last year headed "A Review of the Organisation and Management of Civil Enforcement Appeals". In that consultation document, the Lord Chancellor's Department says that the system is "ripe for change". In paragraph 5.1 it is said that there are

"compelling reasons for change". The interested citizen would say that the Government have taken the problem on board and are willing to address it with some urgency.

This afternoon, as a member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, I had the good fortune to be able to question senior officials, including the permanent secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department, on the progress of the consultation document. I was told by the relevant senior official that the Government had received a large number of responses to the consultation document, that they were being evaluated and that, as a result of those responses, the Lord Chancellor's Department would need to embark on yet another consultation process on a more specific basis.

In the consultation document we are advised that legislation will be necessary to put right the potential abuses that the Government have readily recognised. If legislation is necessary, when might it come about? If there is to be another consultation process, clearly it will miss the boat in the next Session of Parliament beginning in November 1993.

The earliest opportunity for legislation to be put before the House would be in the parliamentary Session 1994-95 and that will depend on the Lord Chancellor's Department's good fortune in finding a place in a Session that is coming perilously close to an election. This is clearly not a major area of partisan interest.

It is very likely that, having recognised the compelling need for change and the injustices that may arise from the current position, the Government will allow matters to drift for several years while those injustices continue to be suffered by individual business people. That should not be allowed to happen. Even if the Paymaster General concedes—as I think he must—that the Government will not introduce the necessary legislation for at least two or three years, I hope that he will tell us that the Government will seek to end the abuses, and to prevent the exploitation of business misfortunes, in the interim period before such legislation is in force.

Having acknowledged the existence of compelling reasons for change and public concern about the lack of regulation of private bailiffs, the consultation document stresses that any system must be cost effective. Given that less than £1,000 was realised on a VAT debt of £30,000, the system clearly was not cost effective in that instance.

The Government concede that there is a lack of general statutory control over the fees charged by agents. Perhaps a strict table should be drawn up showing the fees that are relevant in each case; perhaps a general professional or trade body should be established to regulate the performance and behaviour of bailiffs, including those who act on behalf of the Government, granting certificates only to those of good standing and character and ensuring that certain professional standards are maintained in the enforcement of civil debts. It is also clear that the Government have not carried out adequate supervision.

I believe objectively—on the basis of the examples that have been given and, indeed, on the basis of the Government's concessions and admissions in their consultation paper—that the position is now very unsatisfactory. It is likely to be made even worse, and the temptations are likely to increase, as a result of action that the Government are likely to take soon. That action may well move the position even further away from public accountability, unless the change to a privatised system is coupled with stringent safeguards.

Those dealing with the VAT side of Customs and Excise who give orders to bailiffs may be privatised in the next steps programme that is currently under way. It is conceded that that is relevant to the part of the Customs and Excise operation that covers south Wales and the borders—the south Wales and the borders VAT debt collection management services. A decision from the Government is expected in December.

It is interesting to note that the Roach Group—which has figured largely in the examples that I have given, and which also figured in the HTV programme—was taken over last year by the Capita Group. Capita is a respectable company, which does finance work on behalf of Kensington and Chelsea borough council and has set up an accountancy firm in the white-collar section of the market; it is now trying to move into the blue-collar section, dealing with debt collection. It has expressed an interest in tendering for the contract for the work currently done by civil servants in Customs and Excise: there is thus a danger that the work involved in such enforcement will become even further removed from public control, and further outside the public domain.

We need greater accountability, and a separation of the different stages of the operation. The auctions must cease to be secret, and the public need to feel confident that the agents employed by the Government are acting responsibly. Do the Government accept that something needs to be done in the interim before the necessary legislation is introduced—that is, over the next three or four years? Are they prepared to do anything to prevent potential abuses, and to prevent the cosy relationship between bailiffs and auctioneers that is currently possible? If they are not, the abuses that have been revealed will be allowed to continue.

I suggest that, in the interim, the Government resume a former practice, and allow Customs and Excise officials to carry out spot checks on auctions. Clearly they have contracts with their agents, the bailiffs; under those contracts, they could insist—on a normal commercial basis—that all sales of distrained goods are properly advertised to the general public. That, by definition, is more likely to lead to an adequate return from the sale, and less likely to tempt people to enrich themselves at the expense of a business and an adequate return to Customs and Excise.

Are the Government happy about what is being done in their name by agents? If they are not—and the evidence suggests that they may not be—they should not wait several years for legislation; they should take action now.

I accept that the revelations in the HTV programme may not tell the whole truth, given the nature of the operations available to the journalists and television investigators involved. I accept that there may have been some exaggeration; I accept that those revelations may not have been accurate in every detail. Surely, however, the Government will support a view buttressed by a well-respected solicitor in the city of Swansea. If they accept that the revelations in the programme are substantially true, surely they must now act before more business men are fleeced in the same way—before we see further examples of the public interest not being served, and of business men going to the wall purely to benefit those who purport to act in the name of Government, and as Government's agents.

8.29 pm

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): In Monmouthshire, the full horror of this unhappy issue was brought home by the tragic case of Mr. John Herbert, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

It is, of course, public Departments that have the widest powers of distraint and the most privileged position in insolvency. That is why we see more examples of public Departments abusing those powers than ordinary litigants. The fact remains, however, that enforcement against personal chattels, whether it be by a Government Department, Torfaen or a private litigant, brings us into that extraordinary Dickensian, murky world of bailiffs and auctions in back streets. The picture is every bit as appalling as anything that Charles Dickens depicted—of landlords seizing the last sticks of furniture.

This has gone on for far too long. There may be all sorts of arguments for altering the law on enforcement. There may also be all sorts of interesting arguments as to whether the position of Customs and Excise should be quite as privileged as it is in the case of insolvency. However, the simple, practical question that business men are asking is whether something can be done immediately to improve standards and the way in which the system operates. There should not be conflicts of interest whereby bailiffs and auctioneers are in any way connected.

It may be that the existing law could resolve that problem, but people who are going bust are not the people most likely to litigate. We need a system under which much higher standards are required of bailiffs, with much stricter supervision of them. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General can give us some good news about what may be done.

8.31 pm

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): There are two parts to what the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) said which I shall do my best to try to unravel and deal with separately.

The first part relates to the general law and rules that apply to bailiffs, particularly private bailiffs. Those rules are the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor. The second part relates to the operation of the procedures by Customs and Excise in the case of value added tax. That is a more limited aspect of the question for which I have ministerial responsibility in the Treasury, under my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I shall say a few words about matters that are not my direct responsibility. I refer to the consultation paper, to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention, issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department in August 1992 on the employment of private bailiffs for distress work. That paper covers the law and practice in England and Wales. In Scotland, the law is different in certain respects. Some of the proposals in the consultation document would bring the law and practice in England and Wales nearer to the arrangements in Scotland, which were revised much more recently than those for England and Wales by a recent Act of Parliament.

The paper sought views on whether changes should be made to the organisation and management of bailiffs in the civil enforcement process, the part that the state should play in the organisation and management of bailiffs, the ways in which any changes to the organisation and management of bailiffs could be achieved, and whether any changes to the law governing their work were necessary or desirable.

The hon. Gentleman referred to private bailiffs. There are two types of private bailiff: certificated private bailiffs and non-certificated, plain private bailiffs who are not certificated by the courts.

Mr. Anderson: I understand that the distinction means very little in practice. It is a certificate in respect of road traffic matters. There is no difference in terms of the controls on those bailiffs.

Sir John Cope: It is about rent as well as road traffic matters, but there is another important difference to which I shall turn in a few moments. It was shown that the appointment of certificated bailiffs, as set out in the consultation paper, is subject to varying degrees of regulation by statute, but that there is little statutory control over private bailiffs who are not certificated. The law governing their activities is unclear.

The important distinction, from my point of view, is that Customs and Excise, as a matter of practice, use only certificated bailiffs. That gives Customs and Excise an extra leverage over those whom it employs for this purpose. It is not for me to anticipate what the Lord Chancellor's proposals might be when the consultation period is concluded. It may, however, be worth quoting from the consultation document in order to give the flavour of the Lord Chancellor's approach.

Paragraph 4.4 says:

"The Lord Chancellor believes that all civil enforcement agents should be subject to some form of control over their appointment and that there should be some control over how they do their job, in that they must be subject to disciplinary arrangements if they fail to meet whatever minimum standards of competence and conduct are deemed necessary. There is much room for debate on what these controls and minimum standards should be, and the next section of the paper will consider the various options for change."

The Lord Chancellor welcomed the expression of views. I shall draw my noble Friend's attention to what the hon. Gentleman said about the urgency, as he sees it, of addressing these general points regarding the law and the courts' activities relating to bailiffs.

I intend to deal specifically with matters for which I have personal responsibility—the management of Customs and Excise, and, in particular, the use by Customs and Excise of certificated bailiffs. It may help if I outline the general approach of Customs and Excise to collecting VAT.

VAT-registered traders are required to pay the correct tax at the correct time. They are obliged to render and pay their VAT returns by the due date—usually one month following the end of the VAT return period which, in the majority of cases, is three months. If traders do not submit their returns, an assessment is issued. Where either a VAT return is rendered but not paid, or an assessment is issued but is then not paid, a debt is established and recovery action is required.

The vast majority of traders pay their VAT on time, but some do not. It is important that those who pay on time are not put at a disadvantage compared with those who do not. All must be treated equitably. It is in the interests of those traders who pay on time that, among other things, Customs and Excise should collect the debts from those

who do not pay on time. The prime responsibility of Customs and Excise is to collect the right tax at the right time.

VAT is collected by each registered business from its customers, and Customs and Excise has to collect it properly from each business. A business that delays payment gains a commercial advantage over its competitors. While Customs and Excise is prepared to be as helpful as possible when businesses find themselves in unexpected difficulties, it is rightly criticised, not least by the Public Accounts Committee of this House and others, if it does not carry out its responsibility firmly and fairly within the regulations approved by Parliament.

It is worthing quoting some of the conclusions of this year's Public Accounts Committee's hearing on the subject. The Committee said:

"We note the Department's assurance that they have now stabilised the VAT arrears position. It is important that the further measures now being introduced lead to a significant reduction in arrears in the future . . . We recognise that the Department's primary responsibility is to collect the revenue."

I am sure that the hon. Member for Swansea, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth will appreciate that Customs has that primary obligation to protect Government revenue. At the same time, however——

Mr. Anderson: I accept that it is the primary responsibility of Customs to collect revenues that are due and owing, but is it the Minister's contention that his Department's responsibility ends at that point and that it has no responsibility for the position thereafter?

Sir John Cope: No, I certainly do not contend that. As I shall explain, the bailiffs act as agents of Customs and Excise in carrying out their duties, as do the auctioneers and so on. But we try, and have tried—particularly at a time of recession—to take account of the fact that businesses are experiencing difficulties. It is not, of course, an easy balance for the Customs and Excise to strike but it has to do it every day—it is doing it all the time.

We need as sympathetic an approach as possible subject to the primary responsibility to collect the revenue. What was called the enforcement division has recently changed its name to the debt management division. That indicates a change of attitude. In addition, that division is working through an action programme putting into effect the recommendations of an efficiency unit scrutiny to improve the debt management process.

There are a couple of measures in this year's Finance Bill which will help in that regard and which we shall debate in due course. I refer to the bad debt relief provisions, which reduce the time limit to six months, and to the changes in the VAT penalties. Those measures indicate a positive response to the changes that we are making in the matter of debt management generally.

Once a debt has been established, Customs issues a written demand and gives fair warning of the consequences of failure to pay. The time from the establishment of a debt to the warning letter—during which many people pay—is typically about six weeks. The local VAT office then decides how best to set about recovering the debt if it has not been paid. The decision will be based on the particular circumstances and particular information available about the individual trader.

In the majority of cases, traders have sufficient goods or assets to justify distraint action against them. But if there are no assets either known to exist or discovered on a visit, action through the courts—for example, bankruptcy or liquidation—may be considered, although that is very much a last resort, to be used after other processes have been exhausted.

The position of Customs and the Inland Revenue is different from that of other creditors. I draw that to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth in particular, as he referred to the privileges of the Revenue departments in their position as creditors. Unlike the commercial sector, neither Customs nor the Inland Revenue can choose its customers. Both are therefore involuntary creditors. They do not have available to them the normal commercial practices such as the withholding of supplies to ensure that a debt does not rise further. As long as a trader is trading, his VAT debt is likely to be increasing. The same is true in respect of debt to the Inland Revenue.

As a result, in some cases, insolvency or distraint can be the only recourse to prevent a VAT debt from rising through the trader's being allowed to carry on trading. There is a big difference in the relative positions of a commercial creditor or a bank—which probably has various charges against assets and so on on which it can call and other actions available to it—and the Revenue departments.

In addition to issuing the warning letter, staff at the local VAT office may telephone or visit to attempt to recover the debt. Requests for time in which to settle debts are considered and sometimes agreed to. Customs will consider realistic offers of instalments right up to the time at which any order is made in court for bankruptcy. During 1991-92 there was a 52 per cent. increase in the number of time-to-pay agreements and a 70 per cent. increase in their overall value, which was, of course, a response to the problems of the recession.

If payment is not forthcoming, a distress warrant will be issued by a senior executive officer in the local VAT office. The warrant directs an authorised person, who is a named individual and usually a bailiff—although he can be a Customs officer—to visit the trader and, where necessary, levy distraint on goods. The trader is given an opportunity to pay the debt before such a levy commences.

A walking possession agreement is a legal document, with an undertaking signed by the trader, which allows him to retain the goods distrained for a period of time —usually 15 days and perhaps longer—in exchange for the goods not being removed, sold or otherwise disposed of. The effect of such a walking possession agreement is to give the trader additional time to settle the debt and the costs which are by then beginning to be added to it. At the expiry of the walking possession agreement, if the debt and costs are not settled, the goods are removed for sale.

If the debtor pays the debt and the costs at that stage, the goods are not removed or can be returned. Where it is necessary to proceed to a sale, the goods are removed to a place of storage—usually an auction room—and advertised for sale by public auction. That is the process to which the hon. Member for Swansea, East drew particular attention. It is not a process that is as uncontrolled as he suggested. The VAT (General) Regulations 1985 require that goods distrained upon are sold by public auction. We require that they are properly advertised for sale and appraised before that happens.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister said that Customs requires and ensures that proper advertisement is made. Is he

[Mr. Anderson]

saying that the case in which only a mobile telephone number was given, and in which there was no address, no means of contact and no specific description of the goods for sale, was a one-off—or does it expose a general fault in the system?

Sir John Cope: I shall deal with the details of that case a little later. I want to deal first with the general position, and hope to reassure the hon. Gentleman that the position is not quite as unsound as he may think.

At the sale, both the general public and the trader himself can bid for the goods. The trader is informed about when the sale will take place. That enables him to attend and monitor—or, if he wishes, to bid.

That whole process is quite an effective means of recovering VAT debt. In the year to December 1992 some 407,000 written demands were issued. More than half of those prompted payment without further action, but 186,000 distress visits followed when payments had not been made. Of those, only 27,900 required distress to be levied and a large proportion paid as a result, so that only 1,242 cases continued to sale. That was 0·3 per cent. of the cases for which a written demand was issued.

As the hon. Gentleman realises, it is important that bailiffs who act for Customs should be properly selected. They are selected by local management only from those certified by the county court and believed by the local Customs and Excise to be capable of dealing with VAT debts. Most have experience and provide a service for us frequently, but they are employed on a flexible basis which allows local management to choose alternatives, should the standard of service decline or be unsatisfactory, or should practices be entered into which they do not approve of.

All bailiffs working alone on VAT debt recovery have been issued with written guidance on how to proceed. It is not generally the policy of the Department now for officers to accompany bailiffs in the course of their work, although that happens sometimes. If a certified bailiff fails to perform his duties to a satisfactory standard, two things can happen. First, the local VAT office monitors the performance of the bailiff and draws attention to any shortcomings which it observes, so the sanction is that the bailiff may lose his work for Customs and Excise. Secondly, if the bailiff still fails to perform his duties to a satisfactory standard, the court can withdraw the certificate which allows him to do other work.

In the case highlighted by the hon. Gentleman, he accepted that the television programme may not have given a 100 per cent. accurate impression, but I do not want to get involved in quibbling about details. As a result of the programme, the local VAT office examined the actions of the bailiff company concerned and found that some at any rate of the allegations were unfounded. In the light of what the hon. Gentleman has said, I shall call for further reports to follow up the concerns which remain about that case.

In general, it is not uncommon for auction firms to be associated with firms of bailiffs. However, collusion between an auctioneer and a buyer—the nub of the mischief to which the hon. Gentleman and the programme apparently drew attention—is illegal and against normal commercial law. It is not a matter primarily for Customs, except where auctioneers or bailiffs are acting as its agents, but where there were indications of such practices, Customs would bring that to the attention of the appropriate authorities. The hon. Gentleman suggested that there was no monitoring or insufficient monitoring of the process, but Customs attempts to carry out monitoring.

Mr. Anderson: Can the Minister confirm that practice has changed, and that for the past three or four years Customs officials have not attended auctions?

Sir John Cope: No. From time to time Customs officials attend auctions, sometimes making their presence known and sometimes observing the auction as members of the general public. That is how they attempt to monitor what happens.

I should make clear too that the fees which are charged, and which incidentally are recoverable from the debtor, are in accordance with a scale set out as part of the VAT (General) Regulations 1985. They are printed on the distress documents. Sometimes special action has to be taken for which a special fee is agreed, but the basic fee for the basic service is laid down. Bailiffs do not retain their fees from the proceeds of sale or any money paid on account. All the money is paid to the local VAT office, and the bailiff sends in a bill for his services. The office checks the accuracy of the bill before payment.

There is a difficulty about prices realised at public auction. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged, as I know from experience, that the value of articles can vary according to different circumstances. It is required that goods are sold at public auction and, in the absence of evidence of collusion and of improper practices, Customs have to be satisfied with the amount raised. From time to time, Customs officials attend auctions to ensure that goods are properly handled. Of course, further use of auctioneers and/or bailiffs depends on their findings. Specialist auctioneers are used when certain goods, such as commercial vehicles or machinery, are being sold.

The HTV programme alleged that goods were treated carelessly and in a manner likely to cause damage. Such an approach would work against the interest of an auctioneer, because his remuneration comes from commission on the proceeds of the sale. Therefore, an auctioneer has a direct financial interest in raising as much as possible.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed concern about the possible result of market testing which, as he rightly said, is being undertaken under the Government's general market testing policy. I am not anticipating the results of market testing, but if it was decided to contract out the activity, it would be subject to a contract which laid down a detailed specification of the responsibilities of debt collectors. Policy would remain the responsibility of Customs and Excise, who would still have to ensure that the contractors carried out their duties.

In addition, Customs and Excise officials will continue to be the only people who can sign warrants. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's description of officials who give orders to bailiffs overstated the proposals.

Mr. Anderson: Is not the Minister troubled by the danger that each stage of the process after the signing of the warrant by a Customs official will be in the hands effectively of one company? If the Capita Group is successful in its bid, it will colonise Customs and Excise and be responsible for each stage of the operation from the bailiffs through to the auctions.

Sir John Cope: That may lead to improvements in efficiency and running as well as the difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention. The contract is not without safeguards. I must emphasise that Customs and Excise will still remain responsible for what the contractors undertake on its behalf and will continue to monitor contracts and so on, if that is the way it goes. In addition, debt management officials will continue to be Customs and Excise officials at the warrant signing stage.

The hon. Gentleman referred to various companies. I do not want to comment on individual companies, but I understand that some changes were made in the companies involved between the time that some of the events referred to took place and the time that inquiries were made into them, which may have led to some of the difficulties.

The advertisements in the specific case identified the general type of goods that were involved, such as a photocopier, furniture and so on. There were some telephone difficulties as a result of a reorganisation—the company was moving offices at the time. All of that is not satisfactory. Nevertheless, it explains some of the matters which seem to have caused concern in the cases that were raised on the television programme.

Any decision on contracting out will be taken in the light of assessments of benefits as well as costs in terms of improved efficiency and cost savings, and ensuring that the work involved is carried out effectively. Customs are market-testing the debt management units in 11 of its 22 collections, including the one in south Wales. As the hon. Gentleman said, the result of that market testing is expected in the autumn.

Controls on the use of bailiffs and others by Customs to collect debts are not as non-existent as the hon. Gentleman suggested. However, I certainly acknowledge that it is important that the duties of bailiffs as agents of Customs and Excise, and hence the public, should be properly carried out and that the various regulations that apply to the auctioning of goods in difficult cases should be properly carried out.

All those matters are specific to the management of debt by Customs and Excise. I acknowledge that there are concerns about the general points raised in the Lord Chancellor's consultative document. As I said, I will draw them to the attention of the Lord Chancellor.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 May.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed on Thursday 13 May.

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords]*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords]*

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Unemployment

1. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect on tax revenues of changes in the level of unemployment in the United Kingdom over the last year.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): There are no reliable estimates of these effects. Estimates would require assumptions about, for example, the reasons for the change in unemployment and its wider economic effects—in particular, its effects on incomes and spending. So many uncertainties are involved that the final estimate would be neither accurate nor informative.

Mr. Hughes: Is it not the case that reliable estimates can be made? It is estimated that the cost this year will be £11·5 billion, which is £2·4 billion more than last year. Is not that an enormous price to pay for the Chancellor's mistakes? Would it not be better if the Government spent that kind of money on stimulating manufacturing investment, instead of perpetuating misery on the unemployed?

Mr. Portillo: No. I cannot, for the reasons that I gave, accept that there are such reliable estimates. The variation that would be achieved would critically depend on the reason unemployment was falling. If it was because average earnings were lower or had been held in check or because exports were higher, each would produce different results. As to manufacturing industry, the hon. Gentleman should note that manufacturing productivity is currently at an all-time high and that unit wage costs have been falling in this country while they have been rising in others. Manufacturing exports have never been higher than they are today, and the hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to defeat unemployment is to keep inflation down, to give clear-cut encouragement to firms to get on and create wealth—not to encumber employers with red tape and extra nonsense from Brussels, such as the social chapter?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. I believe that there could be no recovery if we had not succeeded bravely and consistently in bringing down inflation. That was the prerequisite. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the role of deregulation. It must be our continuing policy that the rest of Europe can have the social chapter and we shall have the jobs.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Is not the best response to falling tax revenues from high unemployment measures substantially to cut unemployment, not to raise value added tax? In a Market Access survey published today, 75 per cent. of Conservative Members say that they now favour even more increases in VAT—60 per cent. favour VAT increases on newspapers and 27 per cent. favour VAT increases on rail and bus fares. Will the Chief Secretary give a categorical assurance that he and his Government will not increase VAT on food, transport, newspapers and children's clothes—yes or no?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman continues to be extremely confused and to believe that one can in some way bring down unemployment to bring about recovery. The opposite is true. One brings about recovery, and that will lead to lower unemployment. That is why we have consistently followed policies that have enabled the recovery to take place.

The hon. Gentleman knows that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took special care in his Budget to make sure that the increase in the tax burden did not fall on those areas that affected incentives. As to further extensions of VAT, the hon. Gentleman knows exactly what my right hon. Friend and I have been saying—that is not in our minds.

Savings

2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest figures on the ratio of savings to gross domestic product.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): The latest figures show that the personal sector saving ratio was 11·4 per cent. in the fourth quarter of 1992. Last year, personal saving was at its second highest level in the post-war period.

Mr. Bruce: In 1988, when I last asked that question, personal sector savings were in the region of £17 billion. Since then, they have risen three times in 1992 to more than £50 billion. It appears that while it has been raining in the recession, it has been raining pennies into people's savings accounts. Will my hon. Friend say what that means for the future of the recovery, given that people have been saving so strongly in the past few years?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of the high level of savings. We expect savings to remain high as economic recovery picks up. This is mainly because the full effects of cuts in mortgage interest rates, worth £160 per month on the average mortgage, are feeding through in the form of a significant rise in real disposable income.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) ought to have asked about the indebtedness of the nation—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has had his turn. He ought to have asked about the indebtedness of the nation rather than about savings ratios. It is the indebtedness of the nation that is stopping the recovery that the Chancellor wants. If the Minister agrees with that, what proposals does he have to reduce indebtedness in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Nelson: It is true that the private sector is saving, but the public sector is borrowing heavily. As a result, total saving as a percentage of gross domestic product is low by historical standards. However, Government borrowing is currently high because of the recession. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor spelt out in the Budget a determined programme to tackle the deficit without hindering the recovery, and that is the right approach.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very encouraging—notwithstanding the high level of savings—that retail spending is recovering and that the retail sector generally is doing better? Does not that show that the improvement in the economy is advancing on all fronts?

Mr. Nelson: It does, indeed. We are seeing not only a pick-up in retail sales of record levels but a continued high propensity to save. Both are being delivered through higher disposable incomes arising from the much lower interest rates that people are paying. This is brought out clearly in the fact that last month some 1·2 million households with annual review mortgages saw their interest payments cut by more than £60 a month. This has very important and beneficial implications for the level of spending and for savings.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: What would further increases in indirect taxation do for private sector savings? Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will not increase the rate or broaden the scope of value added tax?

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has just said on that subject. As far as the Budget proposals are concerned——

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Minister is being evasive.

Mr. Nelson: There has been no evasion; the position has been made absolutely clear. As to the future, the Budget proposals set out increases in the rate of VAT, which apply not this year but next year. The reason for that is to ensure that we tackle the deficit about which the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) asked.

Economic Indicators

3. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the economic indicators published since the Budget for car registrations, industrial production and retail sales; and if he will make a statement.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): Figures published since the Budget have shown further increases in car registrations, industrial production and retail sales. These, and a number of other indicators, are clear signs of a resumption of growth.

Mr. Trend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is extremely encouraging that the upturn in economic activity is so broadly based? Is it not evident that this improvement has been under way for some time now in the face of unremitting gloom from the Opposition Front Bench?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is astonishing that that fact gets no recognition from the Opposition. Retail sales have been on a rising trend for about a year; car registrations have risen each month for the past six months and in the first quarter of this year were up 11 per cent. on last year; and manufacturing production in the first three months of this year was 1·5 per cent. up on a year ago.

This poses extraordinary difficulties for the Opposition, as is revealed in this morning's edition of that well-known Tory newspaper *Tribune*. It has an article by the Labour party's noble and candid spokesman in the House of Lords, who asks:

"How should Labour ... react to the news that unemployment has fallen for two successive months?"

The article goes on to say:

"It is much easier to be negative when the economy is in trouble, but what does one say when the economy starts bouncing back?"

That is the dilemma of the Labour party. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) does not appear to want to acknowledge that newspaper, to which he himself contributed an article in the same edition. As he raised the question of VAT—and as he normally intervenes in my answers—perhaps he would care to comment on this statement by the Labour party spokesman in the House of Lords:

"I would remove zero rating for VAT on all items."

That is the proposition put forward by the Labour party spokesman in the House of Lords. I hope that the shadow Chancellor will now intervene.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given that the Labour party is opposed to the extension of VAT to food, children's clothes and transport, will the Chancellor give exactly the same assurance? Can he tell us that there will be no extension of VAT to children's clothes, fuel, food and transport? Will he give an answer—yes or no?

Mr. Lamont: The whole country and the House will have observed that the Labour party seems to have one policy in the House of Commons and another policy in the House of Lords.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recent economic indicators are very good news for the economy and that we must not throw this opportunity away, either by letting inflation rip or by having an uncompetitive exchange rate?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is important that we should see that the recovery is sustainable and is sustained. The policies that we are following will ensure exactly that. The prospects for sustained recovery are good. First, inflation is at the lowest level for 25 years. Secondly, the rate of increase in earnings is at the lowest level for 25 years. At the same time, productivity in manufacturing industry is increasing sharply. Those are all the reasons why the recovery ought to be sustainable.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East—who, of course, could not give an answer—told us that the autumn statement, which, he said, was heralded by almost everybody in November, is now seen to have failed. Since he said that, the number of car registrations has risen in each of the last six months. Manufacturing output rose in January and February by the biggest margin for more than two years. Retail sales have risen to record levels. What the hon. Gentleman says is, as it always is, complete nonsense.

Mr. Beith: Before the Chancellor of the Exchequer gets too carried away by these encouraging and welcome figures, will he reflect on the fact, which is confirmed in the Red Book, that even if we achieve growth of more than 2·5 per cent. and sustain it, we shall still in three years' time have a public sector borrowing requirement of £35 billion? Will he also bear in mind that if he wants to claim any credit for the improvement in figures that he has announced, he will have to accept full responsibility for the desperate depths to which the recession went?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the public sector borrowing requirement as something to which we must devote attention. Firm control of public spending is necessary. That is not something, alas, for which we get support from the Labour party. Although I notice that the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have been very happy to make political capital out of the extension of VAT to fuel and power, that is precisely what they proposed in their own policy document.

Base Rates

4. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many countries in the EC have lower base rates than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lamont: None. The United Kingdom has the lowest short-term market interest rates in the European Community.

Mr. Spring: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that as a result of the substantial interest rate reductions in Britain since 1990, annual corporate cash flow has increased by £11 billion? Does that not provide British industry with an immense opportunity to attack markets, both at home and abroad, with renewed confidence and from a stronger financial base?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He would of course, highlight the fact that half the interest rate cuts, which amount to some £11 billion, occurred before September. That is having a major impact on recovery now. I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend says. In addition to the relaxation in monetary policy, there have been a number of other specific measures: what we did in the Budget last year, in halving the car tax, and then in the autumn statement last year, by removing the car tax altogether. That undoubtedly, in the opinion of the those involved in the motor industry, has been a major stimulus and encouragement to this industry, which is at the heart of British manufacturing. In addition, the measures that we have taken to encourage the housing market—in the last Budget, by raising the threshold on stamp duty, and in the autumn statement, by putting in a very large sum of public money to take empties off the housing market—have contributed to the recovery that we now see.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes, but when the right hon. Gentleman talks about the improvement in retail sales, is he not aware that that in itself will not lead to any recovery? We have a £17·5 billion balance of payments deficit to come. The only recovery will come from exports and investment and it is to those that he should turn.

Mr. Lamont: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that our eyes ought to be on the long term and that the House ought to be dealing with making Britain more competitive and ensuring that our public finances are in sound order. I would stress what the right hon. Gentleman did not—the need to bring down the public sector borrowing requirement, which is a high priority for us. Manufacturing investment, to which I think that the right hon. Gentleman referred, increased in the last three quarters of last year. There has been a large increase in our exports to non-European Community countries, which are up 12 per cent. on one year ago. There is every indication that British industry is highly competitive and that, given the right framework, sustained recovery and the right policies, it can compete and will beat the competition.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in view of our large budget deficit, there will inevitably be upward pressure on interest rates unless that deficit is reduced, as the Government will have to sell more and more Government stock to finance it? Does he therefore agree that it is vital that public expenditure is reduced in the November Budget so that interest rates can be kept low and the recovery continued?

Mr. Lamont: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that there is a connection between the total borrowing requirement and interest rates, both at the short and the long end. It is important for us to have public expenditure under control and for the PSBR to be on a declining path. I notice that the Labour party seems to agree with that sentiment and seems to wish to get on the attack over it, but we have not heard one suggestion from the shadow Chancellor to rectify that aspect of policy.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Chancellor accept that now interest rates are down to a tolerable level, perhaps the most important thing for manufacturing industry and the jobs dependent on it is to maintain the stability of interest rates, so that there can be a foreseeable interest rate level for the investment cycle? When considering future interest rates, will the right hon. Gentleman also bear in mind pensioners who have a relatively small amount of money saved and are dependent on interest for the money on which to live?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman refers to interest rates being at a tolerable or acceptable level; they are at the lowest level for 15 years and are the lowest in the European Community and mortgage rates are at their lowest for 20 years. He also referred to savers and I entirely agree. During the last Question Time in which I answered questions about interest rates, I said that I thought that the postbag on interest rates was running 50:50 in favour of higher rates. In all honesty, it is now running at 8:1 in favour of higher rates.

House Prices

5. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of recent indicators concerning the level of house prices.

Mr. Nelson: On the Halifax measure, house prices have risen for two months in succession. House builders and estate agents are notably more optimistic and have consistently been reporting increased activity. Those signs are very encouraging and clearly point to the level of activity rising further during the year.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my hon. Friend agree that the increasing activity in the housing market is further evidence of a rise in general economic confidence? Is not it clear that changes to stamp duty in the Budget and the buying-up of empty properties announced in the autumn statement last year have had a beneficial effect?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is right to say that there have been increasing signs of confidence in the housing market and in the economy generally. The buying-up of about 23,000 empty properties and doubling stamp duty to £60,000 have helped sentiment, but the biggest boost to confidence in the housing market has come from the significant reduction in interest rates, which has brought mortgage rates to at or below 8 per cent. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said, that is the lowest level for 25 years.

Mr. Soley: Are we to assume from the Government's Budget changes that they are continuing to phase out mortgage income tax relief? If so, may I ask them not to do what the President of the Board of Trade advised a few years ago, which was to abolish it entirely except for first-time buyers, and instead to consider some of the more sensible proposals such as giving a subsidy to low-income home owners without artificially inflating the housing market, which would also allow renting to become an economic activity again, for landlords and tenants?

Mr. Nelson: The Government have taken measures to assist and promote the rented sector, such as the deregulation of rents, the renting a room schemes and others. However, as for mortgage interest relief generally, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made the position for next year clear in his Budget statement. Every year in the Budget statement, the rate of mortgage relief is set for the following year. This is not the right time to make a Budget statement for the next financial year.

Company Profitability

6. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the CBI to discuss company profitability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has frequent contacts with the CBI.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest problems facing companies in my constituency and throughout the United Kingdom in their return to sustained profitability is the difficulty in getting working capital from banks? When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor next meets the CBI, will he be able to say that the Treasury plans an issue of two to three-year gilts especially designed for banks to buy, as foreshadowed in the Budget? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that would be the best way to ease liquidity in the banking system, thereby helping companies to get the working capital that they so desperately need?

Mr. Portillo: I do not want to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said about funding in the Budget statement. Indeed, I would have anxieties about the pressure that such short-term gilts might have on inflation. The key to liquidity, about which my hon. Friend is worried, is the maintenance of low inflation and the restoration of profitability, which depend on the recovery. I think that she will be encouraged by the forecasts for company profitability.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Given that company profitability was regenerated only when Britain was forced out of the exchange rate mechanism, why are the Government now indulging in nonsense about interest rates not coming down further and trying to talk up the pound again? Do they not realise that the only answer to the problems of a country that is in horrendous deficit and whose manufacturing base has shrunk below the levels of

viability is competitiveness, competitiveness, competitiveness—competitiveness and competitiveness, now and for ever? Why not put Group 4 in charge of the pound?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman was in some danger of repeating himself during that question. I agree that competitiveness is very important, which is why the fact that unit wage costs have fallen in Britain while they have continued to rise in Japan and Germany is extremely encouraging. The hon. Gentleman should note that the encouraging performance of exports and retail sales began during the first half of last year. He should not put his faith in devaluation, which has never been the way out of problems for this country. He should consider the improvements in our competitiveness, which have been achieved in the last year by company managers getting control of productivity and quality and ensuring that they keep down wage and other costs.

Ms Harman: Given the importance of levels of investment on profitability, the fact that the Red Book forecast that business investment is to fall by half a per cent. this year and the fact that CBI industrial trends show that manufacturing firms are cutting investment, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied with the present level of investment? If not, what is he going to do about it?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady often repeats statistics, and I have had the privilege of hearing her make that point many times. However, she has not read the figures carefully. If she excludes investment in the North sea—investment which, because it is lumpy, rises and falls—she will find that investment has been rising. Even at the very lowest level predicted for the first half of 1994, business investment will be 14 per cent. of gross domestic product. That is historically a very high figure and is higher than that achieved for any year between 1970 and 1986. The hon. Lady will recall that her party was in power for some time during that period.

Industrial Production

7. **Mr. Milligan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the level of industrial production in the last 12 months; and what was the equivalent change in Italy, France, Germany and Japan.

14. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the level of industrial production in the last 12 months; and what was the equivalent change in Italy, France, Germany and Japan.

Mr. Lamont: Comparing the latest three months with the same period a year ago, industrial production has risen by 1¼ per cent. in the United Kingdom but fallen by 8¼ per cent. in Germany, 5 per cent. in Japan, 4½ per cent. in Italy and 3¾ per cent. in France.

Mr. Milligan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures show that we, and our manufacturing industry in particular, are doing much better than our competitors in Europe? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Ford Transit plant in Southampton, which employs many of my constituents, has shown a sharp increase in production and in quality, and a 20 per cent. increase in productivity, over the past two years? The plant is now producing vans significantly more cheaply than the equivalent plant in Belgium. Does not that suggest that the prospects for manufacturing industry in this country are better than they have been for many years?

Mr. Lamont: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He gives a powerful example, about which I shall want to read more. My hon. Friend is right about the statistics. My reply to his question did not cite all the figures for the United Kingdom. From peak to trough of the recession, industrial production fell by 7¼ per cent. in the United Kingdom. The recession in Germany continues, and so far industrial production there has fallen by 12·3 per cent. In Japan it has fallen by 11¼ per cent. so far and in Sweden, where recession also continues, it has fallen by 18½ per cent. so far.

The same examples and parallels can be drawn for retail sales. From peak to trough, they fell by 4 per cent. in this country, whereas so far in Germany they have fallen by 8·8 per cent. and in Japan by 6·5 per cent. In Sweden retail sales have fallen by more than 27 per cent. so far.

Opposition Members like to think that the recession that came to this country was unique to the United Kingdom. The facts demonstrate dramatically that the truth is very different.

Ms Short: Does not the Chancellor understand that if there is recession across the world, that is dangerous for Britain and he should not glory in it? Europe is in difficulty, Japan is turning down and there is every sign that the American economy might be beginning to dip again. The Chancellor is pushing up the value of the pound, but it was the devaluation of the pound alone that brought up the British economy. We might lose our recovery, so the right hon. Gentleman should not crow about conditions in other parts of the world but should seek to achieve international co-operation to improve employment in the world economy.

Mr. Lamont: I am in no way crowing. I simply mention facts that I have never heard mentioned by any Opposition Member. The hon. Lady talked about international co-operation, and I entirely agree with her. We strive for international co-operation in the European Community and in G7. The hon. Lady mentioned the exchange rate, but the pound is floating; we have no exchange rate target. But I observe with some amusement that when the pound goes down that is thought to be a good thing, and is described as "floating", but when the pound goes up, that is thought to happen under the influence of the Government.

Business Surveys

8. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the results of business surveys taken since the Budget.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): The unanimous message of recent business surveys is that confidence has strengthened and industry is moving out of recession.

Mr. Thompson: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that that is more good news for the Martyn Lewis school of broadcasters. I hope that note is taken of that. Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to read the latest quarterly economic survey by the Norfolk and Waveney

chamber of commerce, which shows a dramatic improvement in confidence, in orders and in deliveries on the home front and, perhaps even more important, an improvement in export performance?

The survey also shows that there is recognition of the need to continue to keep inflation down and to provide stability, and also an appreciation of the measures that the Government introduced in the Budget and in the autumn statement to help the construction industry and, most important, to help exporters. That is good news. Should we not broadcast it?

Sir John Cope: Yes, it is good news for everybody, although I realise that some Opposition Members have difficulty in recognising it. I have not yet had an opportunity to see the survey about Norfolk to which my hon. Friend referred. Nevertheless, it sounds as though the report sends out the same message as that sent out by all the other surveys that I have seen recently.

Ms Eagle: Given the fact that it was the accidental almost 20 per cent. devaluation of the pound that triggered the recovery that we are seeing at the moment, what are the implications, in the Minister's opinion, of the gradual rise of the pound over the past few weeks?

Sir John Cope: The hon. Lady is quite wrong in the first part of her assertion. If she looks at the figures, she will find that the improvement started before the events to which she drew attention. It is there for all to see and many of the figures have already been referred to this afternoon.

With regard to the exchange rate, the hon. Lady will know that we do not forecast and have no target in that respect. However, of course it is important and we watch it closely.

Mr. Butcher: Does my right hon. Friend agree that business surveys show that small and medium-sized manufacturing companies are concerned about the shortage of risk capital for those unquoted companies? Does he further agree that there would be a dramatic effect in our competitive position vis-a-vis our fellow Europeans if this country were to consider the radical measure of abolishing capital taxation, thus making our country a haven for the inward location of capital, which is very scarce around the world, and perhaps learn from the lessons of Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore? That would give us a serious and important competitive edge.

Sir John Cope: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of small and medium-sized firms. The small firms part of the CBI survey, to which attention was drawn recently, shows that they are expecting to employ more people in the next few months. That is confirmed very strongly by surveys carried out by the Institute of Directors and by 3i. Chamber of commerce and Dun and Bradstreet surveys are also positive. All that emphasises the importance of small firms.

As for my hon. Friend's taxation proposals, all I would say is that we have recently presented a Budget and the Finance Bill which contain a series of taxation proposals. Those are the proposals which we are pursuing for the time being.

Mr. Darling: Have those business surveys included the subject of boardroom pay? Some boardroom members appear to have been to the Martyn Lewis school of salaries. Will the Government take the opportunity to condemn some executives who have been taking exorbitant pay levels, such as the reputed £10 million paid to a Royal Bank of Scotland executive, when those executives and Ministers have been calling on the less-well-off to take small or no pay increases? What are the Government proposing to do to ensure that everyone is treated in the same way and that the people who already have a great deal do not continue to line their pockets at the expense of others?

Sir John Cope: I am not going to comment on individual salaries or amounts of remuneration. However, the hon. Gentleman and the House know that the Government and Ministers set an example in that respect this year which I would like to see followed much more fully by leaders in industry and commerce—as indeed it has been by Members of this House.

Retail Sales

9. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the current trend in retail sales and their impact upon the economy.

Sir John Cope: Retail sales in the latest three months were 3·25 per cent. higher than a year ago, and have now been on an upward trend for a year.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while that is extremely good news for the British economy and very bad news for the Labour party, it is important that British industry now takes the opportunity to expand its export trade, backed by a stable pound?

Sir John Cope: I entirely agree about the importance of exports. Clearly retail sales figures show the opportunities at home, but a good home market is the foundation for exports and that also should be pursued.

Mr. Bennett: Given that the Government are now claiming that the recession is over, when will they apologise to all the victims of it? What specific help can they give my constituents, particularly engineers who lost their jobs in their late 50s and still see no prospect of ever getting another job, people who have had their homes repossessed and see no chance of ever being able to buy another home, and young couples who are stuck in high-rise flats with small children and with little or no prospect of getting a home away from those flats?

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend has already made it clear this afternoon, as well as on previous occasions, that the depth of the recession here has not been nearly as bad as in other countries. I am not quite sure whether the hon. Gentleman expects me or any other Conservative Member to apologise for the performance in other countries as well as in Britain. Of course, a recession is very difficult for a lot of people and that is why it is important that we are now moving out of it. All the figures that we have been discussing this afternoon are positive and encouraging for all of us.

Stamp Duty

10. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from the Manufacturing and Construction Industry Alliance, the Building Employers Confederation and the Housebuilders Federation about stamp duty.

Mr. Nelson: We have received representations only from the Housebuilders Federation. It welcomed the doubling of the stamp duty threshold.

Mrs. Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that stamp duty is an archaic tax which suffocates the housing market? Will he respond positively to the representations from the Construction Industry Employers Council and the Manufacturing and Construction Industry Alliance by restricting the tax payable to a percentage of the amount by which a property's value exceeds £60,000; or, better still, will he announce that the tax will be abolished altogether?

Mr. Nelson: I should like to be able to announce that. I know that stamp duty is not a much loved tax, but it will bring in this year on land and buildings £570 million, and on shares it will bring in more than £1 billion next year, so it is a very significant source of income. As for making a tax-exempt band as opposed to a threshold, the cost of doing that would be very significant; it would amount to £270 million. We have already gone a long way. In the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a significant, welcome and important increase in the stamp duty threshold.

Mr. Gunnell: Could the Economic Secretary tell me the percentage drop in the number of transactions involving stamp duty as a result of the Budget changes? Is he using that as an argument to close the Leeds stamp duty office? Is he aware that there is great concern in the Leeds financial community about the closure of that office? Does the hon. Gentleman realise that, in closing the office, he is going against the trend of other financial institutions, all of which regard Leeds as a growing and strengthening centre for financial services?

Mr. Nelson: As for the number of transactions, that has been picking up recently. I acknowledge immediately the hon. Gentleman's concern. I know that he has represented the interests of that office in his constituency on this matter. He will know that I have written to him. Some regional stamp duty offices have been changed largely because of advances in technology as well as the need to save costs. Although a relatively small number of people are involved, I acknowledge the importance of that local service to many businesses.

I am sorry that I am not able to give the hon. Gentleman a more favourable reply today than I have done in my letters, but I am always prepared to hear his representations.

Profit-related Pay

11. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the latest available number of live profit-related pay schemes; and what the numbers were a year ago.

Mr. Portillo: There were 4,615 active profit-related pay schemes at the end of March 1993—getting on for double the number a year ago. The number of active schemes has more than trebled since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer increased the tax relief in his 1991 Budget.

Mr. Taylor: The figures that were given by my right hon. Friend are extremely good news for workers in those companies. Also, given the extension of employee shareholding organised by the Government, does that not show that we can extend co-operation and consultation with workers and enable them to share in the benefits of their companies much more effectively on the basis of participation in profits than the collectivist-imposed solutions favoured by the Labour party and by the social protocol? Does it not prove that we put up and that they should shut up?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are now 1·2 million employees participating in profit-related pay schemes. There are 2·9 million employees participating in all-employee share schemes. Both those schemes are highly commendable. They have attracted the approval and support of the Trades Union Congress. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that such schemes is the way to get employees involved. It means that all employees have a vested interest in the success and profitability of companies. That must be the right way to handle it.

Mr. Battle: Can the Minister explain why the Government are spending British taxpayers' money on advertisements placed in the German press to tell Europe that Britain now has the lowest wages in the whole of Europe? Is that something of which the Government want to be proud?

Mr. Portillo: We are enormously proud that the United Kingdom has become a haven for inward investment. We are the envy of Europe. We are attracting 40 per cent. of Japanese investment into the European Community and about the same proportion of investment from the United States. Is the hon. Gentleman so xenophobic that he wishes to turn away that investment?

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the quantity of advertising spend is a sensitive barometer of the state of the economy? Is he aware that the amount of advertising for retail sales is up 4 per cent. on the first quarter this year and the amount of advertising on television is up 7 per cent. on the first quarter of this year? Does he think that that is an excellent advertisement for not only the Conservative party but its economic policy?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct about advertising being an indicator of activity in the economy. It has been increasing. I was not precisely aware of the figures that my hon. Friend has set out but I have no doubt —*[Interruption.]* I must have missed them in the welter of other encouraging economic news that I have seen.

Mr. John Smith: Yesterday the Prime Minister boasted to the Newspaper Society about the number of manifesto

pledges he claimed to have carried out during the year. Why was there no reference whatever to taxation in that speech?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is in no position to talk to anyone about taxation. I recall that it was his talking about taxation that played a significant part in the fact that we are sitting here and he is sitting there.

Mr. John Smith: The House will have noticed that the Prime Minister studiously avoided answering the question. Is not the real reason why he forgot to mention taxation that he wants the voters in the elections today to forget that his Government's VAT and national insurance increases will cost the typical family in the United Kingdom another £8·50 every week?

The Prime Minister: How interesting that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should say that because I have in front of me a quote that I shall read:

"I favour the higher band income tax and the removal of the ceiling on national insurance contributions that Labour's 1992 Shadow budget proposed. Failing that, I would remove zero rating for VAT on all items."

That is the noble Lord Desai, an Opposition spokesman on economic matters in the House of Lords.

Mr. John Smith: The Prime Minister knows well—because Lord Desai has written to him—that the noble Lord was on the Back Benches when he said what he said —*[Interruption.]* He also knows——

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. John Smith: Is it not the case that—let the Prime Minister understand that he cannot run away from this —in the general election he made clear and specific promises not to increase VAT and national insurance contributions? Surely the last thing that he wants people to remember today is that his promises and Tory promises are worthless.

The Prime Minister: Clearly the right hon. and learned Gentleman has lost touch with his own party. The quote that I used, far from being elderly, is in *Tribune* today.

Sir John Wheeler: Will my right hon. Friend find time to examine the growth of bureaucracy which is seriously impeding the work of the police and the criminal justice system? Is my right hon. Friend aware that even the simplest case these days requires a trail of paperwork and that the more serious cases are such that the expensive time of detectives is now more likely to be spent on paperwork than on the investigation and detection of crime?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my right hon. Friend about that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, like me, wants to see police officers solving crime, not pushing paper. That is why he is setting out proposals to see how much paperwork can be cut. The more we can free our police from that work, the better they can do the work that I and every other hon. Member of this House would like to see them carrying out.

Q2. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Roche: In view of Asil Nadir's breach of bail, should not the Prime Minister come clean about Nadir's contribution of £1·5 million to Tory party funds?

Madam Speaker: Order. May I make it clear to the House that, while that matter may be of some interest, there is no Government responsibility—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, there is."] Order. There can be no Government responsibility for finance given to a political party.

The Prime Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, you are of course entirely right about that. I notice that the hon. Lady does not mention the remarkable sums that the Labour party received from the late Robert Maxwell. I cannot, of course, comment on the details of Mr. Nadir's case, which is currently before the courts.

Mr. Waller: Because the Bosnian Serbs possibly doubt the resolve of the United Nations to act forcefully against the atrocities that we have seen in recent weeks and months perpetrated by the Bosnian Serbs against the relatively defenceless Bosnian Muslims, will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the House that we and our allies will not abnegate our responsibilities to take any action that may be deemed necessary to bring those atrocities to an end?

The Prime Minister: Our highest priorities have to be to secure implementation of the settlement plan, to deter further Serbian offences and to sustain humanitarian relief. In one important aspect, things have changed in recent days. President Milosevic of Serbia has committed himself to the Athens agreement. Whatever views may emerge from the self-appointed Bosnian Serb assembly, the international community expects President Milosevic to make good that commitment. He should do so, in our judgment, by closing Serbia's borders with Bosnia, cutting the supply of weapons and other goods and exerting all other possible pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. The Serbian people must realise that they will come under mounting pressure from throughout the international community until there is a peaceful settlement. That is the essence of the common approach that we have agreed with our allies.

Q3. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Worthington: Could the Prime Minister devote some time to the appalling situation in Sudan, from which the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) and I have recently returned? There is mass starvation, the interruption of food supplies, the harassment of the Christian churches and the prevention of the international aid agencies from doing their work. Will the Prime Minister take up the matter with the Security Council to bring an end to the appalling 10-year civil war and allow uninterrupted work by the Christian churches and the international aid agencies, which are doing valuable work there?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious matter. I fully share his concern and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) about the distressing situation in Sudan. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we took a lead in the United Nations General Assembly last December when it adopted a resolution condemning the Sudanese Government's human rights

record. Also, of course, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has decided to appoint a special rapporteur. We are looking at the moment to the negotiations under Nigerian auspices. We hope that they will succeed in ending the civil war. I certainly would not rule out a future role for the Security Council. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend could perhaps let me have a more detailed report of what they saw in Sudan. I would welcome that as I should like to discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Dr. Michael Clark: Is my right hon. Friend receiving letters, as I am, from pensioners and others receiving benefit who are concerned in case that benefit should be paid exclusively into banks and building societies? Will he confirm that benefit will continue to be available from post offices and sub-post offices, thus giving the customers a choice, in line with Conservative policy?

The Prime Minister: This is a matter on which concern is raised from time to time. We have made no proposals to make those changes. If we had any firm proposals to make those changes we would bring them before the House.

Q4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Will the Prime Minister find time during a busy and probably worrying day for him to reflect that when he and I were leaving school student grants were adequate and most discretionary awards were paid for higher degrees? Does he not think that the present situation, where higher degrees are not awarded grants by local authorities, is a deterrent to less-well-off students and the nation will lose their skills? Is it just that he is unconcerned because he got where he is with three O-levels?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is inaccurate in most of the things he says. His essential mistake about the future is that he entirely overlooks the vast increase in the numbers of young people going into higher education. Virtually one in three young people now goes on to further education. Those are wholly different circumstances from when the hon. Gentleman and I left school.

Mr. Congdon: Is it not good news that British Telecom is to reduce the cost of connection charges by £40? Does this not show the benefits of privatisation combined with a tough regulatory regime?

The Prime Minister: It certainly does and it certainly would not have been so efficient without privatisation. Privatisation has brought better service and lower charges for gas, electricity and telecommunications and that is why we continue to support it, unlike the Opposition who have supported no new idea of any sort for years.

Q5. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Parry: The Prime Minister will be aware of the meeting last night in the Grand Committee Room where Mr. Nelson Mandela met Members of all parties and both Houses. The meeting was well attended and Mr. Mandela got a standing ovation on both entering and leaving the room. What help can the Government give to South African in the forthcoming general election, particularly in investment from Britain?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and I separately met Mr. Mandela during his visit to the United Kingdom. We had the opportunity of discussing a whole range of issues: the difficulties with violence, the progress with the talks and the prospects for transition to a peaceful, multiracial democracy in South Africa. We discussed the range of ways in which we could help, both personally and publicly.

One area that would be of immense help when the transitional Government is formed would be the immediate removal of sanctions and that is now of great importance to Mr. Mandela, as he probably mentioned last evening. The underlying concern that exists there is extremely serious. South Africa has nil economic growth, 7 million people unemployed, a 3 per cent. annual growth in the birth rate and badly needs international investment and the removal of sanctions. The sooner that can be agreed by all parties in this House, the better it will be for South Africa.

Mr. Alexander: Will my right hon. Friend hesitate a little before deciding to abolish the May day bank holiday? Ideological considerations apart, is it not a fact that more people enjoy having an early summer day's break than would enjoy a break at the beginning of winter? Is it not further the case that the May day bank holiday gives a welcome and much-needed kick-start to the leisure industry which a holiday at the end of October could never begin to do?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's advice on that important matter. When we have an announcement to make, we will bring it to the House.

Mr. Shore: The Prime Minister will recall that yesterday the European Communities (Amendment) Bill was debated and that in the course of the debate an amendment was passed, as a result of which the House has unanimously agreed to strike out the protocol that the Government had previously negotiated for an opt-out from the social chapter.

Can the Prime Minister now tell us whether his respect for the views of the House of Commons is sufficient for him not now to pursue his previous goal of completing the ratification of the treaty? If he is not prepared to give that guarantee to the House, will he at least now let the people of this country have a chance to vote on their future, when the House of Commons is unable to influence the Government even by a majority vote?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows as well as any hon. Member the implications of being a parliamentary democracy. We are a parliamentary democracy, and I am not in favour of referendums. The sole effect of the amendment to which the right hon. Gentleman referred is to remove the social protocol from being incorporated into United Kingdom law, but the opt-out remains part of the treaty. So let me repeat very clearly that we will ratify the treaty which I signed at Maastricht: no change, no social chapter, no back-door socialism.

Bosnia

3.31 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the situation in Bosnia.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I regret that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs cannot be here today to make a statement on Bosnia. In his absence in Hungary, and in the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Hogg), I will reply.

The policy of the Government remains as set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in last Thursday's debate and in giving evidence yesterday to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. This is a twin-track policy. One track is our effort to secure agreement on the Vance-Owen peace plan and its implementation. The other track is intensification of the pressure on the Serbs should they remain intransigent.

A new and unwelcome development is the refusal of the Bosnian Serb assembly to ratify Dr. Karadzic's signature of the peace plan negotiated by Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance. Their decision is irresponsible and will damage the cause of peace in Bosnia. It will also damage the interests of the Serbs.

Despite this, we continue to consider the Vance-Owen plan the best chance for a lasting peace in Bosnia. We call on all those with influence and, in particular, President Milosevic to redouble efforts to persuade the Bosnian Serbs that the only way forward to a better future is acceptance of this plan and full co-operation in its implementation.

We must continue to make it clear that the international community is prepared to intensify its pressure. Sanctions are already seriously damaging Serbia and will be made even more effective in the Adriatic, on the Danube, across the land borders and in relation to financial movements.

The Government have made it clear that we do not rule out other options. We shall continue consultations with our partners and allies on such measures.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the Minister of State. The House understands the absence of the Foreign Secretary.

Is the Minister aware that the whole House will agree with him and with the widespread international condemnation of the decision early this morning by the self-appointed, self-styled Bosnian Serb assembly to repudiate its leader's signature on the Vance-Owen peace plan at the weekend? The Minister will also know that we agree that there will be unanimous rejection of the absurd delaying tactics—of holding a referendum on that decision.

Will the Government make it clear in the Security Council—I believe that it may soon be in session—that policy must now be firm and resolute in pursuit of the Vance-Owen peace plan, but that it must also be measured and not precipitate? In particular, will he recall that it was the clear threat of military force—in our view, by means of air attack—combined with the sort of severe sanctions that should have been in place a year ago which led to the agreement last weekend; and that these threats must be kept in place?

Will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind the fact that the decision early this morning was taken in the face of the direct advice of President Milosevic and other Bosnian Serb allies, and that the Security Council must immediately examine how this situation—of a serious split between Belgrade and the Bosnian Serbs—can be used for the future? Will he therefore agree that President Milosevic, who has been for so long a supplier of arms, finance and moral and political support to the Bosnian Serbs, must now make it clear that they have no alternative but to sign the Vance-Owen peace plan—or else he must join Russia and the rest of the world community in ensuring that their isolation is complete?

Does the Minister's statement that other options have not been ruled out mean that the British Government may not veto the lifting of the arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia? Secondly, will he explain the statement by his fellow Minister of State on the BBC's "World at One" from Brussels about the new situation requiring an intensification of the blockade? Has not that already been done; should it not already have been done?

Thirdly, will the Minister ensure that the Security Council urgently examines ways in which the civilians in besieged Muslim towns can, through agreement and negotiation, be given whatever protection is possible? Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman take this message from the House, both to the European Community and to the UN Security Council: that those who stand in the way of peace in this afflicted part of the world will never ever be forgiven?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tone in which he asked his question, and for his broad support for the Government's position. I agree that we should not regard the vote taken by the so-called Bosnian assembly, for a referendum, as in any way definitive; and that we should continue, as he has suggested, to exert all the pressure we can on Mr. Milosevic, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has just said, to join us in bringing this pressure to bear—for instance, by closing Serbia's borders with Bosnia, by cutting off the supply of weapons and other goods and by exerting every possible pressure on the Bosnian Serbs.

The intensification of the blockade is indeed taking place. As the House knows, that requires a large measure of international co-operation. For instance, the Western European Union's decision to provide assistance for strengthening the blockade on the Danube is now being implemented, and the Government are increasing the number of people whom we are sending out to help support the blockade—in the form of customs officers, for instance.

Finally, I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the whole House wants to send the Bosnian Serbs the message that the international community is united against the actions that they have taken, that they will receive no benefit from any conquests that they think they have made, and that the peaceful answer to this question must in the end take the form of a settlement negotiated around the table of the sort that Lord Owen and Mr. Cyrus Vance are seeking to produce.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a grave and dangerous moment, and that there must be no question of further major commitments of troops to the area unless and until a viable peace plan looks as though it will be agreed, or has been agreed, and the guns begin to fall silent?

Does he also accept, as I think he will, that the robust line taken by the western allies and the international community in recent days has had a direct deterrent effect on some of the participants in the bloodshed, particularly Mr. Milosevic, who sounds as though he is getting distinctly nervous, and that that deterrent effect must be kept in place by making it clear that we are prepared to consider the options that have been examined by the NATO planners, the Americans and ourselves, including the use of force, to coerce the people into understanding that, if they carry on with the bloodshed, they will receive worse even than they give?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I agree with both points that my right hon. Friend has made. His statement about no further commitment of troops is the firm policy of Her Majesty's Government, and we intend to stick to that policy. He is absolutely right in what he says about the pressure that the international community has already exerted on the Bosnian Serbs. That pressure should be sustained. I agree that the military options he is talking about must remain on the table; they will do so.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Does the Minister agree that the sad decision of the Bosnian Serbs must not lead us to break off dialogue with them, but that that decision makes it necessary for us to consider direct intervention to protect the Muslim enclaves which are besieged? In particular, does he agree that, in Srebrenica, the agreements about water supply given to General Morillon have been declared null and void? Does he agree also that, at Tuzla, where 700,000 are without means of feeding themselves, it must be imperative to reopen the airport?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I cannot comment on the specific points that the hon. Gentleman has made, because I am not at present advised on them. Certainly we need to continue consultations with the United Nations. We very much welcome the decision of the High Commissioner for Refugees to set up safe areas in Zepa and Gorazde by agreement with the parties. I understand that they want an international presence and not military enforcement, and that they continue to focus their efforts on delivering aid to those towns.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that this is a private notice question? I am looking for direct questions to the Minister on the comments that he made —not long statements, but direct questions.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the American authorities that our troops, not theirs, are at risk daily in Bosnia, and that lifting the arms embargo will mean the immediate withdrawal of those troops?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence had close consultations with the United States Secretary of State over the weekend. I believe that all those matters were discussed. I think that the position taken by Her Majesty's Government, and, indeed, the French Government, on these matters is well understood by all our allies, including the United States.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): If eventually the Vance-Owen agreement is signed, it will require the insertion of a large number of troops, 75,000 or so, and they will need to be there very quickly. If there are fewer, the operation will become unviable. What contingency plans have been undertaken? How many troops have we promised? If the Russians, the French and the Americans have promised, will we make a commitment, because much planning has to be done? Once the agreement is signed, the time for planning is over and the time to send troops to enforce the agreement has come.

Mr. Garel-Jones: As the House would expect, we have been and are making contingency plans but, of course, those will be relevant only if a real peace agreement is signed. As I said in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), we do not intend to commit British troops against the uncertain background which currently exists, and which might be exacerbated if wrong measures were taken.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): In view of the serious situation, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that, whatever may happen to the Vance-Owen agreement, his prime objective in the coming weeks and days will be to make sure that British troops who are already there are protected, in so far as that is possible? My right hon. Friend has said that no more troops will be sent unless the Government are satisfied that their safety is assured.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes, I can give my right hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The protection and well-being of our troops are the highest priorities for this Administration.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Only four days ago, along with three other hon. Members, I witnessed scenes so horrific that I trust that I shall never have to see them again. At Bosanskibrod, in the north of Bosnia-Herzegovina, we stood at the edge of a mass grave as the bodies of civilians, some of them aged 75 and female, were exhumed. They were probably all Serbs and probably all massacred by Croats.

Will the Minister bear that in mind as an illustration of the fact that atrocities are being committed by all sides? Will he also bear in mind the fact that, even as those bodies were being exhumed, that area was being handed back to the Croat military? That underlines the difficulties of implementing the plan, even if the Serbs agree.

Will the Government maintain the even-handed approach that they have sensibly deployed over the past few months, and resist any pressure from sections of the media to turn this into a holy war against the Serbs or the Serb nation, because that would result in an even greater holocaust than anything that we have seen so far?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for conveying to us the horror that he and, I am sure, all of us would have felt at that manifestation of what is happening in the former Yugoslavia. It makes the point that all of us—even the Government, who are pursuing, as

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we see it, the right policy, albeit that is a difficult furrow to follow—must understand that hon. Members who seek to advance alternative policies on us do so with the utmost sincerity.

Because of the horror of what is happening, it is inevitable that hon. Members in all parts of the House will seek ways to bring a peaceful and just settlement to that unhappy part of the world. I take that to be not just the will of the House but the will of the international community.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): My right hon. Friend spoke about tightening sanctions. Will he take full account of the special position of the neighbours of the former Yugoslavia, in particular Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania? Will he ask the Secretary of State to pass on our appreciation to those neighbours, because the cost of sanctions to those countries has been far in excess of anything that the rest of us can understand? Will he also urge those countries to use their good offices to press on the former Yugoslavia the fact that the closure of the Serbian border may be the best way forward?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The co-operation of neighbouring countries—my hon. Friend mentioned Bulgaria—is absolutely essential to the success of our policy. I certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister assure us that the options which he mentioned, and which the Government will always keep open, will exclude the further committal of troops—unless, as the Minister has already said, it is to implement a peace plan? Will he exclude air strikes from those options, which, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, would place our troops at risk not only from what is euphemistically called "friendly fire", if experience is anything to go by, but from retaliation? I am sure he accepts that the safety of our troops must be foremost.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I accept the latter part of his question. We have expressed in the House—my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so when the matter was last debated—our reservations about air strikes, but, as we seek to sustain the pressure, the House will accept that we would not want to rule out any option.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that it is our troops and the French troops who are at the sharp end? Will he take every opportunity to discourage those, both in the House and outside, who are constantly calling for more direct action for air strikes, which would inevitably bring down retribution on our troops? They would be the ones who would suffer, and many of those who are now talking loudly and clearly about what "we" will do really mean what "you" will do.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and, as the House will be aware, were we to pursue that policy, there would have to be a serious doubt as to whether we could continue with the humanitarian efforts that we have been successfully engaged in for the past year. He is also right to say that the effort by the European Community has, on the ground, substantially meant a troop commitment by the United Kingdom and the French republic. Naturally enough, both of us have as our prime concern the protection and safety of our troops.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Is it not unacceptable that Bosnian Serbs are still mounting attacks on the civilian population of Zepa and elsewhere? Will the Minister make it clear that the other options that he is holding in reserve, for example air strikes, are directed not just at the Serbian regime in Belgrade but at the Bosnian Serbs? Will he also make it clear that, if they continue to defy the will of the international community, those options could be taken into play to force the Bosnian Serbs to accept the will of the United Nations?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I cannot add much to what I have already said. We do not discard any option, but it would not be helpful at this stage if I were to speculate in the way that the hon. Gentleman invites me to do.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I recognise the difficulty in which my right hon. Friend understandably finds himself, in the absence of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. However, I would be grateful if he would elucidate the answers that he has been giving, which, on occasion, seem to be contradictory.

He has said several times that all options remain open. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have constantly assured the House and the country that we shall not put in forces for any war purpose. They will be there only for humanitarian reasons or, in the event of a complete agreement about a peace treaty, to supervise, but not for warlike purposes.

Therefore, will my right hon. Friend make it plain, when he says that all options remain open, that that is not an option? Will he also make it plain that, if the Americans decide to bomb, we shall withdraw our humanitarian forces, because otherwise the fear that is already widely held—that we are being dragged, step by step, further into a bloody civil war—will remain?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity, if I have not been clear enough about it, to reiterate that the one option that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence have ruled out is the commitment of combat British troops to war on the ground in Yugoslavia. That option is entirely ruled out, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have made that clear on a number of occasions.

As to the option of selective bombing, we again have expressed our reservations about that and not least among those reservations is that it would almost certainly bring the humanitarian effort to an end and place our troops on the ground in grave danger.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Having seen, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), the results of the massacre by Croats of Serbs and Muslims at Bosanskibrod in region 2 of the Vance-Owen plan, I plead with the Government not to regard that plan as sacrosanct. Not only in the region that we were unfortunate enough to see last Sunday but in region 10, which has been allocated to the Croats and the Muslims, bitter fighting is already taking place between the two. Is it not time for us to put equal pressure

on Croatia which, after all, was responsible for the aggression in Krajina on 22 January and is supporting the regime that committed atrocities around Vitez?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I believe that the Vance-Owen plan is the best option that we have at the moment, and it is the one around which the international community has rallied. The hon. Gentleman referred to atrocities committed by Croatians. I do not believe that any ethnic group in Yugoslavia is free of guilt in those matters, but most right hon. and hon. Members are clear where the main burden of guilt lies.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Is my right hon. Friend not concerned that the Bosnian Serbs will continue to procrastinate until they have won all the territory they want to gain, and that only at that stage will the assembly or any other body actually sign the Vance-Owen peace plan?

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is in his place on the Front Bench, may I also ask the Minister whether he is concerned for the morale of British service personnel in Bosnia—particularly the Cheshire Regiment, many of whose families live in my constituency? They are deeply concerned that, in their humanitarian role in Bosnia, they are unable to do anything about the rape, killing, pillage and destruction that they see before their very eyes every day. They are powerless to stop the killing.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Member's point about the Bosnian Serbs seeking to gain advance by conquest is one that they will no doubt have in mind. The international community is absolutely determined that no territory gained by a conquest of that kind shall be accepted by the international community. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his speech, those so-called conquests by the Bosnian Serbs will prove to be empty conquests—I have no doubt about that.

As to the performance and morale of our own troops in the Cheshire Regiment, on the wireless this morning, Colonel Stewart said that morale was very high. That is not surprising, because, even though the Cheshires have to perform a frustrating and delicate task, they have the satisfaction of knowing that the substantial humanitarian aid that they have delivered over the past six months has certainly saved hundreds of thousands of lives in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Since political pressure is likely to be far more effective than a more adventurous approach, perhaps the Minister would care to act on two suggestions. First, he should persuade his political associates not to embark on premature and whole-hearted approval of Croatia at this time, since that would send entirely the wrong signal to Belgrade. Secondly, he should persuade his colleagues in Western European Union to make public the evidence that they have possessed for months of the extensive breaches of sanctions. It is now obvious that political pressure would be best served if that evidence were made public and subject to open debate in Europe.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that political pressure is the route down which we must go. The sanctions regime has in some instances not proved to be wholly satisfactory. We have taken a number of measures to tighten sanctions, which are having a substantial effect now. From our experience, most of us believe that a sanctions policy that is as tight and strict as we can make it can be one important ingredient in the armoury at our disposal in bringing pressure on Belgrade.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on.

Business of the House

3.59 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 MAY—Progress in Committee on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, first day.

Motions relating to the National Health Service Orders. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

TUESDAY 11 MAY—Progress in Committee on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, second day.

Motion relating to the Sea Fish Licensing (Time at Sea) (Principles) Order.

WEDNESDAY 12 MAY—Progress in Committee on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, third day. The House will be relieved to know that I have no plans as yet for a 24th day.

THURSDAY 13 MAY—Committee and remaining stages of the Non-Domestic Rating (No. 2) Bill.

Proceedings on the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill.

FRIDAY 14 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 17 MAY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Motion relating to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

The House will also wish to know that, on Wednesday 12 May at 10.30 am, European Standing Committee A will meet to consider an EC document relating to the fisheries agreement with Argentina, and European Standing Committee B to consider the Commission green paper on Community action regarding the media.

[Monday 10 May:

National Health Service Orders:

National Health Service (Determination of Districts) Order 1993 (SI No. 574);

National Health Service (District Health Authorities) Order 1993 (SI No. 572);

National Health Service (Determination of Regions) Order 1993 (SI No. 571).

Wednesday 12 May:

European Standing Committee A

Relevant European Community Document:

4769/93 Fisheries agreement with Argentina

Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 79-xxiv (1992-93).

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community Document:

4213/93 Concentration in the media

Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 79-xxi (1992-93).]

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. The Opposition undertake to facilitate the passage of the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill, because we understand the urgency of the position and support the Government's aims in this respect.

May I remind the Leader of the House of the length of time that has elapsed since we had an Opposition supply day? We have made repeated requests for a debate on the public expenditure programme. We hear almost daily of the Chief Secretary's desire to cut a programme that we have not had a chance to debate. If we had a chance to assess the shape of the programme, it would also give us an opportunity to focus on the waste and mismanagement over which the Government are presiding.

That was further revealed in evidence about the Wessex health authority which was given to the Public Accounts Committee only the other day. It is now suggested that over £60 million was wasted. This was drawn to the attention of three successive Secretaries of State—indeed, I believe the Lord President himself gave some parliamentary answers on the matter—but they did not act, although the Department's auditors were warning about the situation that was developing. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the present Secretary of State to make a statement about this, and also what is happening with regard to small pharmacies, which are increasingly under threat as a result of Government proposals?

May I remind the Leader of the House that—although he did not exactly give an undertaking—he did suggest that there might be some time after Easter for a debate in Government time on the White Paper on stock-taking with regard to the legislative arrangements for Scotland. He has given some indication that he will look at it; I hope that he will look at it again.

Mr. Newton: On the right hon. Lady's request for an Opposition supply day, she knows that I am sympathetic and will look for an opportunity to meet her wishes as soon as possible. It was also an Opposition wish that we should spend quite an extensive amount of time on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, and the announcement that I have just made meets that request. I do not think that I can be so forthcoming about her request for a debate about what amounts to speculation about public expenditure. Some reference to that may well be in order—subject to your ruling, Madam Speaker—during the debates on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, but the proper time to debate such matters is when there are some definite proposals. As to the stock-taking point, I will consider what the right hon. Lady has said, but I cannot give any immediate commitment.

Let me say—on behalf of the whole House, I am sure—that I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Lady and her right hon. and hon. Friends for the attitude that they have adopted over the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill. The spirit in which she made those remarks is much appreciated by the Government and, I am sure, by others.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): May I add my voice to the request of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) for a statement on or clarification of the Government's policy towards small pharmacies? The policy, as I understand it at the moment, is just a touch puzzling. Clarification would be helpful. I am in favour of small pharmacies.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's remarks. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will also take note of them. I shall draw his request to her attention.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): In the light of the debate that is to be held on 14 May on a private Member's Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), to reform the Shops Act 1950, and in the light of the concessions that the hon. Gentleman made in Committee, can the Leader of the House say whether he has yet had a chance to consider the nature of those concessions and whether he will now provide time to enable that Bill to proceed? Has he seen the early-day motion that has been signed by 248 Members in all parts of this House?

[That this House notes the recent rulings of the European Court and the House of Lords upholding the Shops Act 1950; now demands that major national retailers set an example by closing their stores on Sundays in observance of the rule of law and in recognition of the sovereignty of Parliament; and urges the Government to support the honourable Member for Ogmore's Shops (Amendment) Bill which received a majority of 173 at Second Reading on 22nd January and which was amended in Committee to make it a compromise solution so that it both meets the reasonable needs of consumers, including DIYs, garden centres as defined by the Horticultural Trades Association and convenience stores up to 3,000 square feet in size, and substantially maintains the special character of Sunday.]

The motion urges the Government to provide time to enable this legislation to go forward. Will the Leader of the House lay a motion before the House, if necessary, to test the opinion of the House on deregulation so that, once that is disposed of, this Bill can become the Government's own Bill and can be promoted without any further delay and this crazy situation, in which the law is being broken by the day, can be rectified at last?

Mr. Newton: I have of course noted the early-day motion, but I have no plans for action along the lines that the hon. Gentleman suggests. The Government's position over a long period regarding the provision of Government time for private Members' Bills is well known. I do not anticipate any change. Equally, the Government's position on the whole issue, and their intentions, is well known; it has been clearly and repeatedly stated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The Government intend to bring before Parliament their own Bill, providing a choice for the House on the main options for the reform of Sunday trading.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Can I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate next week on the laws that cover the licensing of people to hold guns so that I may raise the case of a constituent who was allowed to hold a gun under licence, despite the opposition of his wife, who repeatedly wrote to the authorities saying that she was very frightened? She was shot dead by her husband last week. He then shot himself in front of their nine-year-old child, to the devastation of the family and the community. Is there not something wrong with these laws and should not something be done? Certainly this House ought to discuss the matter.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that everyone who has heard what my hon. Friend has just said will join him in his concern about that particular case and its tragic consequences. I cannot, nevertheless, promise a debate. However, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, within whose area those licensing matters come, will be here to answer questions on Thursday 13 May.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Can we have a ministerial statement to the House next week on the bureaucratic disaster of the Benefits Agency, about which the Social Security Select Committee reported yesterday? Is it not disgraceful that, in so many cases, payment of benefits was delayed until long after the disabled applicants had died? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many people are describing what has happened as one of the worst cases of maladministration in living memory?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman—above all, perhaps—will be aware not only of the Select Committee's report but of the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People is studying that report in detail and will be replying to it. It would not at this stage be proper for me to anticipate his reply to a Select Committee report.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): I am deeply disturbed about the cuts imposed by the Eastern health and social services board for health service provision in my constituency of North Down, particularly the hospital cuts. Can the Leader of the House provide time urgently to debate this vital issue, which is of such concern to my constituents?

Mr. Newton: I cannot immediately undertake to provide time for a debate, but I can of course—and do—undertake to bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it be possible for the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary to make a statement early next week about Mr. Nadir—certainly if he does not return to this country? Is it not absolutely essential, in the interests of justice, to counter the view that is held by many people outside this place, that a person in much humbler circumstances would not have been able to flee the country and justice, and then boast about it immediately after he had done so? A statement by the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary is absolutely essential.

Mr. Newton: There seems to be a good deal of unanimity in the House this afternoon. I think that everyone would deplore what happened and support my right hon. Friends in doing everything that they can to achieve Mr. Nadir's return to this country. That said, I cannot promise the statement that the hon. Gentleman wants, but I can happily say that, on two successive days next week, those people to whom his question was most clearly directed will be here to answer questions—the Foreign Secretary on Wednesday and the Home Secretary on Thursday.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the crossrail project, which will have a considerable effect on a number of

[Mr. Richard Page]

constituencies, including my own. Can he give any idea of when he feels that the measure may be presented to the House in the shape of a Second Reading?

Mr. Newton: I hope that that will not be delayed too much longer, but I cannot give an immediate undertaking, let alone a date. My hon. Friend, whose interest in the matter I well understand, will be aware that consultants were asked to re-examine the crossrail proposals to ensure that the project can be taken forward as a joint venture with the private sector. They have just completed their re-examination, and my right hon. Friends are considering their conclusions.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate next week on my early-day motion 1947, which has already been signed by more than 100 people?

[That this House recalls the pledges made by the President of the Board of Trade on the consultative processes in the 10 pits, and equally remembers the pious utterances of concern expressed by British Coal; and therefore calls upon the former to condemn, and the latter to cease, the practice of blackmailing miners into voting for closures by placing artificial and very short time limits for the receipt of enhanced benefits, as exemplified in the Grimethorpe closure.]

In particular, can he ensure that the President of the Board of Trade speaks from the Government Dispatch Box to assure us that he stands by his clear and unequivocal promises to the House that enhanced redundancy payments would be maintained until the end of the normal consultation period, and that, before the closure of any pit, it would at least be offered for sale to private enterprise? It is proposed that Grimethorpe pit should close on Monday, so the matter requires some urgency.

Mr. Newton: While I cannot promise the debate that the hon. Gentleman seeks, I can as ever undertake to ensure that my right hon. Friend is aware of what he has said. British Coal's assurances still stand—its redundancy terms will be calculated on earnings before the October closure announcement or up to the date of redundancy, whichever is greater.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his announcement that the House will have the opportunity next week to progress the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill, and welcome the support given to the measure by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)?

Is it intended that all stages should be passed next week? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to encourage commerce and industry to avail themselves of that important facility is for the House to give the measure a speedy passage? Having visited Bishopsgate today for a second time, and seen the devastation, may I ask my right hon. Friend to take the opportunity to send the good wishes and congratulations of the House to the police and contractors who are working to restore normality to the area?

Mr. Newton: The answer to the latter part of my hon. Friend's question is an unequivocal yes. On the first part, in announcing the business as "proceedings on" the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill, my phrasing was intended to indicate the hope that we would be able to complete all the stages.

Mrs. Beckett *indicated assent.*

Mr. Newton: Once again, I am happy that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) is nodding in a highly responsible and helpful fashion.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As always.

Mr. Newton: Or as she mostly is, but I am happy to see that that is her hope, too.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House press the Attorney-General to make a statement next week about the criteria that the courts observe when granting bail? Does he agree that many people suspect that there are two laws: one for the rish and powerful with friends in high places, who are often facing serious charges and are granted bail which enables them to skip the country with ease; and another for poorer people without such influence, who are often facing minor charges and are banged up on remand for months and invariably acquitted when they at long last reach the courts? Is that not an intolerable situation, and do not the courts need clear guidance on the criteria that they should observe?

Madam Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House replies, may I again make a plea to hon. Members to be brisk with their questions? I attempt to call all hon. Members but I cannot do so if some make long statements and comments instead of asking direct questions.

Mr. Newton: I must make it clear that I know of absolutely no basis for some of the suggestions and implications in the hon. Gentleman's question. However, he will know that there is concern about bail affecting people of all types and in all conditions reflected in the support from all parties, which has been expressed in the Chamber several times in recent weeks, for the Bail (Amendment) Bill, sponsored by one of my hon. Friends.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Cran.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Christopher Gill, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gill: I am sure that it was the sun in your eyes, Madam Speaker.

Will the Leader of the House consider early-day motion 1950, which I and a number of hon. Friends have signed and which refers to a bilateral treaty between the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation which will be ratified within the next few days?

[That this House asserts that ratification of the bilateral Treaty with the Russian Federation, laid before this House on 1st April, which requires that relations between the two countries be governed in particular by their commitments under CSCE documents, would be inconsistent with ratification of the Maastricht Treaty which requires Britain's external relations to be governed by the Common Foreign and Security Policy.]

Will my right hon. Friend give the House the opportunity to debate these matters and, in particular, to establish the relevance of that bilateral treaty, and the

other bilateral treaties which Russia has signed with other European countries, to NATO and other institutions of the western European community?

Mr. Newton: I have noted my hon. Friend's early-day motion. The note that I have is to respond by saying that there is no inconsistency—if that is what my hon. Friend is getting at, which seems possible—between the United Kingdom's obligations under the bilateral treaty with the Russian Federation and its obligations under title V of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate early next week on the Serious Fraud Office so that we can discuss its failure to hold Asil Nadir even though I understand that it was notified of his imminent departure? May we at the same time have a debate on the Government introducing legislation to require political parties to publish their accounts, and thereby remove some of the sleaze around the Tory party?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have heard the exchanges during Prime Minister's Question Time. I should be more willing to respond to the hon. Gentleman's latter point if we were hearing rather more about the late Mr. Robert Maxwell, and if there were perhaps some contribution from the Labour party to the pensioners' funds.

As for the first half of the hon. Gentleman's question, he will be aware that the circumstances in which Mr. Nadir left the United Kingdom are currently under investigation, and I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to predict or speculate on the outcome.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Transport to give a clear explanation next week of why British Rail is being allowed to increase its fares for Regional Railways, with no notification to passengers and in advance of privatisation, thus driving more people off the railways?

Mr. Newton: The House is likely to have considerable further opportunities to debate railway transport matters in, I hope, the not too distant future. I would not wish to excite the hon. Lady's hopes of a statement of precisely the type she seeks, but I shall bring her request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the dispute in Hampshire social services about the qualifications of foster parents because two lesbians have been allowed to adopt a child? May we have a debate on this very serious matter, which does not seem to be getting the necessary exposure in the House but which is becoming increasingly prevalent?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that the law relating to adoption is primarily the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who, I am sure, is aware of the matter that he has raised. However, I shall bring his question to her attention.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): The Prime Minister's comments this afternoon about Government policy on paying pensions through banks and building societies seemed to contradict answers previously given in the House by the President of the Board of Trade. In view of many pensioners' fears about possible closures of sub-post offices, and of the apparent confusion in Government policy, will the Leader of the House find time next week for a statement on that important matter?

Mr. Newton: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made some fairly clear-cut remarks on that matter only an hour or so ago, I cannot see a basis on which I could sensibly ask for a further statement next week.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): The Leader of the House will be aware that elsewhere in the country people are voting in county council elections today. Yet the 7 million people in London have been denied that right —denied the opportunity to vote for an authority in London. Will the right hon. Gentleman make time available for us to debate the democratic rights of Londoners, so that we can discuss the possibility of a strategic authority for London, which would give Londoners the democratic right available to everyone else in the country—the right to vote for their own authority?

Mr. Newton: Having voted in Essex at about 10 seconds past 8 o'clock this morning, I fully appreciate such democratic opportunities. However, I do not detect any massive agitation in London for the opportunity to vote for the Greater London council again.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Leader of the House will know of the concern felt about the oil tax changes that we shall debate next week, with 10,000 or more jobs at risk. Although a Committee of the whole House will debate clause 183 of the Finance (No. 2) Bill, relevant amendments to other clauses may follow on from amendments made to that clause. Can the Leader of the House guarantee that, if such an amendment is passed, the Government will accept the consequential amendments in Committee?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is asking me to become involved in some rather detailed procedural issues concerning debates that may take place next week. I shall be rather cautious about doing so. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the intention is that the main clause dealing with the petroleum revenue tax should be debated in the House on Tuesday. I have no doubt that, were consequential amendments to arise, the Government would take the appropriate action, or recommend such action to the House.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to his reply concerning the Shops (Amendment) Bill and early-day motion 1929, which carries 250 signatures of right hon. and hon. Members, will the Leader of the House consider whether the Attorney-General could make a statement next week about those who continually break the law, although the Law Lords have already made a definite decision to uphold the Shops Act 1950? When will the Government ensure that that law is enforced in this country, as they try to enforce the laws on other matters?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that the primary responsibility for the enforcement of the law on that matter rests with local authorities. I shall, of course, bring his request to the attention of the Attorney-General, but I am afraid that I cannot add to what I said earlier to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Leader of the House may be aware that controversy has burst out again concerning the unique Scottish verdict of "not proven", used in criminal trials. The controversy has contemporary significance in connection with the tragic case of the murder of a young girl in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

So far, the Government have refused to act until the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure in England and Wales reports, but that is an extraordinary pretext when used by those who glory in the independence of Scots criminal law. In order to maintain that independence and integrity, will the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for Scotland ensure that we have a debate soon on the "not proven" verdict?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot encourage the hon. Gentleman in the expectation of a debate on that matter, but no doubt he will find various ways of pursuing it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): May I press the right hon. Gentleman further about the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)? In the light of the facts that the Serious Fraud Office has now admitted that it was tipped off on Saturday night that Mr. Nadir might leave the country, and that the police say that they took appropriate action—many of us think that the action cannot have been entirely appropriate, as Mr. Nadir is not here any longer—does not the Leader of the House think it important for the appropriate Minister to make a full statement about why the authorities, having been put on their guard that there might be a problem, were apparently unable to prevent that man from leaving the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Newton: I will, of course, bring that question and the earlier question to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. However, I am not going to go beyond what I said earlier. These matters are under investigation, and I do not think that it would be right for me to speculate about the outcome or to draw immediate conclusions.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): May we have a debate on the salaries of Members of Parliament and of Ministers? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the words of the Maastricht treaty mean what they say, over the next five of six years there will be a gradual transfer of powers from this House to Brussels and, morally, there should be a commensurate reduction in the salaries of Members of Parliament accordingly? If my right hon. Friend thinks that I am wholly wrong in the analysis, is he prepared to bet the level of an MP's wages that I am wrong?

Mr. Newton: I think that the only response that I can make to that is that I am glad that my hon. Friend appears to have exempted Ministers from his proposals.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on. I am not prepared to call the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) who has already been called in business questions. As for the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I understand that he sent apologies to the Chair in respect of the fact that he was outside the Chamber working when the statement was made. I cannot accept that, because, if I did, I would have to accept such a reason from hundreds of hon. Members who went into the Library to work and then returned to the Chamber wanting to ask a question. I know that the hon. Member for Linlithgow is a very experienced parliamentarian and that he entirely understands my reasoning and will accept it.

BILL PRESENTED

Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism)

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang and Mr. Neil Hamilton, presented a Bill to provide for the payment out of money provided by Parliament or into the Consolidated Fund of sums referable to reinsurance liabilities entered into by the Secretary of State in respect of loss or damage to property resulting from or consequential upon acts of terrorism and losses consequential on such loss or damage: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 191.]

Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

4.26 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): It is a privilege to open this debate on the Royal Navy, a subject on which this House has not had the opportunity to hold a full day's debate for nearly two years. During this period, the global security environment in which the Royal Navy has long played such an important and successful role has undergone momentous changes. So momentous indeed that as many of the old cold war certainties fade away only to be replaced by new and more imponderable challenges, some of us in the business of naval forward planning these days occasionally yearn for the stark simplicity and clarity of Lord Nelson's famous signal at the battle of Trafalgar: "England expects that every man will do his duty."

Of course, in one sense the duty of the Royal Navy is crystal clear. It is to play its part in the three defence roles which were set out in the foreword to the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992" by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. Those three roles were: first, to ensure the protection and security of the United Kingdom and our dependent territories, even when there is no major external threat; secondly, to insure against any major external threat to the United Kingdom and our allies; and, thirdly, to contribute to promoting the United Kingdom's wider security interests through the maintenance of international peace and stability.

It goes without saying that the Navy's contribution to these tasks will be of pivotal importance for the naval assets of our island nation and have the mobility, reach, flexibility and sustainability to react to the unexpected and to offer maritime security and deterrence to our vital interests and dependencies across a globe which is two thirds ocean.

Therefore, today's debate is an opportunity to put, as it were, some naval flesh on the bare strategic bones of the three defence roles that I have just outlined, by telling the House how the Royal Navy fulfils its current commitment and operations and by giving some insight into our thinking on how the Navy will fulfil its changing tasks in the future. I will also at a later stage in my speech cover equipment, personnel, and force restructuring matters.

The last debate on the Royal Navy in the House took place on 27 June 1991. My hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement opened his speech by paying tribute to the men and women of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary for the part which they played in securing the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. It is good to record that their fine contribution has now been formally recognised by the award, earlier this year, of the battle honour "Gulf 91" to 15 of Her Majesty's ships, six Royal Navy air squadrons and 10 ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. But the Royal Navy has not rested on those laurels. Since that previou. debate it has been continuously engaged around the world.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This morning I gave notice to the office of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that I would like to ask about the role of the Navy in cleaning up the ecological problems of the Gulf. Will the Minister of State for Defence Procurement say a word on what the Navy is doing? The problems are continuing.

Mr. Aitken: We were grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving notice. As the hon. Gentleman gave notice to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, he will cover the point in his reply to the debate.

The Gulf is one of the most important areas in which the Royal Navy regularly operates. The Armilla patrol, which is now in its 13th year, continues to provide reassurance to British shipping and to operate in support of the United Nations sanctions on maritime trade with Iraq. Although Saddam's naval forces are quiescent for the time being, Iran has decided to raise the stakes of sea power among the Gulf littoral states by becoming the area's first submarine navy. Iran's neighbours in the region are watching Iran's naval build-up with increasing concern —a build-up which has been symbolised by the purchase and, more recently, the deployment of a Russian built hunter-killer submarine of the Kilo class.

Having visited the Gulf five times in the past six months and going on board Her Majesty's ships on two occasions during those visits, I have been left in no doubt by our friends in the area how much they appreciate the Royal Navy's important contribution to the stability of the area. That contribution is particularly well measured by those with long memories, for Britain has had a continuous naval presence in the Gulf for well over half a century. Although gone are the days when there used to be a common Arabic saying that when two fish are fighting in the Gulf the British are behind it, our more discreet presence today still has a valuable impact.

It is symbolised by the steady vigilance of the Armilla patrol and enhanced by special ship visits. Perhaps the most notable of those was the visit in March of HMS Triumph to Abu Dhabi. That was the first ever visit by one of our nuclear submarines to a Gulf port, and I believe that its presence left a clear and important message of reassurance to our friends in the region.

Referring to the security of our dependent territories, throughout past years naval forces have been deployed in support of garrisons in the Falklands, Belize and Hong Kong. The Royal Navy carries out joint operations with the authorities of those countries and of the United States and our dependent territories to combat the menace of narcotics smuggling, particularly in the Caribbean. The West Indies guard ship plays its part in those operations, and during the hurricane season it is well equipped to provide humanitarian relief. Last year, HMS Cardiff, assisted by HMS Campbeltown and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Orangeleaf, provided valuable assistance to the island of Eleuthera in the wake of hurricane Andrew.

Ships of the Royal Navy are regular visitors to many of our dependent territories, from Hong Kong to St. Helena, and the new ice patrol ship, HMS Endurance, is just completing her second successful deployment to Antarctica in support of our interest in that region.

Those regular deployments form part of a wider pattern of deployments and visits aimed at developing the Royal Navy's operational capabilities, exercising with friendly navies and supporting our foreign policy and defence sales objectives. In 1992-93, Royal Navy ships showed the flag in 90 countries. Of particular note was the deployment of Task Group Orient 92, which consisted of four warships and two RFA vessels, led by the carrier HMS Invincible to

[Mr. Aitken]

the far east for seven months. That was the first such far eastern deployment since 1988. We regard it as having been highly successful because of the tangible benefits arising, as they do, from joint naval exercises, growing export sales interest and general political goodwill, and all that in a region of growing political and economic importance.

I should also mention the visit of HMS Battleaxe to the Russian Baltic fleet base of Baltiysk. In its way, that visit was symbolic of the new spirit of naval co-operation that prevails between Britain and Russia in the post-cold war era, because Battleaxe was the first warship of the Royal Navy to participate in such joint manoeuvres with a cruiser of the Russian navy. More recently, we have seen Russian ships working alongside coalition naval forces in the Gulf helping to enforce UN sanctions on trade with Iraq. That has been very welcome as a gesture of international solidarity against Saddam and as an unprecedented opportunity for western navies to forge closer links with their former adversary. The Royal Navy has been at the forefront of those efforts and will continue to play a leading role in the important work of building on the new friendship between east and west in a practical way. In support of NATO, the United Kingdom continues to be a major contributor of maritime forces. We provide ships on a continuing basis in the Atlantic and the English channel. Since its formation last year, we have done the same for the standing naval force in the Mediterranean, which goes by the indigestible acronym STANAVFORMED. That force is currently engaged in the enforcement of United Nations sanctions and the arms embargo in the Adriatic—an example of how NATO's revised maritime force structure is adapting to new tasks.

As well as contributing to STANAVFORMED, the Royal Navy is involved, both afloat and ashore, in support of operations in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. A carrier group led by HMS Ark Royal is deployed in the Adriatic at present with an air group of Sea Harriers, recently enhanced with a laser-guided bomb capability, and Sea King helicopters as well as artillery. HMS Ark Royal is there to provide additional protection for United Kingdom forces ashore and, if necessary, to assist with the withdrawal or reinforcement of United Nations forces. That presence powerfully demonstrates the flexibility and utility of one of our capital ships with the air power that she is able to deploy if necessary to provide assurance and deterrence to friend and foe.

Mr. Dalyell: As the author of an excellent book on President Nixon, which I enjoyed greatly, the Minister is in a better position than most to be frank with the House about the Anglo-American relationship. Is HMS Ark Royal in any way related to or under American command in these circumstances?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving my book that commercial plug in the middle of our Navy debate. I am sure that my booksellers and publisher will be grateful. Reading about the life of President Nixon has perhaps endowed the hon. Gentleman with a certain degree of conspiracy theory about the Anglo-American relationship which does not exist, if he reaches the end of the book. As far as the episode to which I am referring is concerned, there is no United States control of HMS Ark Royal—it would be wrong to suggest that there was.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): On the obverse side of what the Ministry has been saying, in the press release issued by the Ministry of Defence this afternoon there is reference to the task group comprising HMS Ark Royal, HMS Broadsword and what I take to be the Dutch frigate De Ruyter, which, on the face of it, appears to be under the command of the overall British commander of the task group. Is that an example of the sort of co-operation between European maritime nations that we should be in favour of and hope might be more frequent in the future?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes a good and timely point. There is good co-operation between European navies, especially in the matter of enforcing and increasing the pressure on Yugoslavia. It is going on in the Adriatic and the Danube. For some years, we have had a close relationship with the Royal Netherlands Navy through joint marine exercises. That is a natural extension and co-operation of how we work together. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for drawing attention to the good relationship.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Before my hon. Friend leaves the matter of the Netherlands and its marines, does he agree that the deployment of the task group to the Adriatic, and especially the deployment of HMS Ark Royal in a role for which she is not wholly designed, in addition to the normal naval air role—the deployment of soldiers—exemplifies the need for a purpose-built amphibious helicopter carrier and that it should be procured at the earliest possible date?

Mr. Aitken: I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend. Although HMS Ark Royal has done good service in providing the possibility of that amphibious capability, it is not purpose-built for that task. That is one of the considerations we took into account when we announced that the landing platform helicopter carrier was firmly in the defence programme. I shall say a few words of encouragement on the subject of the landing platform helicopter carrier later.

I should also mention as part of the record of our role in the Adriatic that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's Resource and Sir Percivale are also in the area. They are in Split to provide accommodation and shore support for British forces ashore. There are also four Sea King helicopters of 845 naval air squadron based in Split. Although their primary role is to assist with casualty evacuation of UN forces, they also took part in the airlift of sick and wounded civilians from Srebrenica, and they stand ready to carry out such humanitarian tasks again if needed.

One other United Nations operation in which the Royal Navy is involved which I should mention is in Cambodia. Seventy Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel are deployed there on peace-keeping duties as part of the United Nations transitional authority. They are involved in the patrolling of the Cambodian coast and the Mekong river system. This is the first time that the UN has included a maritime element in its peace-keeping operations.

Moving closer to home, Royal Marine commandos continue to take regular tours to Northern Ireland, while

the Royal Navy conducts patrols in Northern Ireland waters in support of the security forces. The fishery protection squadron patrols the United Kingdom's fishery limits and, following a review last year, Ministers agreed that that task should remain with the Royal Navy at least for the current year. The squadron acquitted itself well during the recent period of tension in the fishing grounds of Guernsey and will continue to ensure that fisheries regulations are fully and properly enforced.

In addition, the squadron is well placed to respond to a range of operational and humanitarian contingencies in United Kingdom waters. Some of the operations are in support of our law enforcement agencies. For example, last November HMS Shetland assisted customs officers in making a record seizure of 20 tonnes of cannabis worth about £60 million.

Lastly in this summary of our commitments, I should like to emphasise how well the Royal Navy has served our nation by continuing to underpin our national security by maintaining continuous deterrent patrols by our Polaris submarine for the past 25 years. In that period, the former Soviet Union has moved a long way from those dangerous years when Mr. Khruschev hammered with his shoe on the rostrum of the United Nations shouting the threat, "We will bury you". We were certainly glad then that we had such a sure shield against a possible nuclear attack.

Although that particular threat has mercifully receded, we should not forget that the world remains a dangerous and unstable place in many ways. It is imperative that we continue to safeguard the security of our realm against all possible external threats. It is vital that in Trident we maintain a deterrent which will be the ultimate safeguard of our nation's freedom well into the next century.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Minister has paid tribute to the Polaris regime and its deterrent effect. Would it not be far more logical to tell the House exactly what the Government intend to do in terms of developing the Trident programme? If Polaris is to be a deterrent, surely it is essential that people know what it is capable of. Would it not be a good time to break the tradition of secrecy about nuclear weapons and tell the House of Commons what is going on?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman has a naive attitude both to the importance of deterrence and the surprise element in it and to the importance of not letting any potential adversary or enemy know exactly what Trident might or might not be able to do.

Within obvious constraints, we disclose a great deal of information to the House through the Select Committee. We have answered questions with considerable frankness about our studies of a sub-strategic role for Trident. Although we obviously keep matters such as warhead numbers and targeting secret, we are reasonably candid in our parliamentary democracy with the House and with the country.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that it is no use having nuclear submarines if they are locked into port because the approaches to their ports are strewn with mines? Will he say a word about the attitude of the Ministry of Defence to new orders for Sandown minehunters? Some years ago the Ministry of Defence invited tenders for seven new Sandown class minehunters. The invitations for tender were withdrawn in 1991. I gather that the minehunters will be required in 1994. Perhaps my hon. Friend could say when invitations for tender will be required once more.

Mr. Aitken: Yes, I shall do so. If my hon. Friend will be patient, I will answer his question when I come to our forward equipment programme.

I wish to say a further word about Trident. The Trident programme continues to make excellent progress. It remains on schedule to enter service from the mid-1990s and it is well within budget. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced in January this year, the currently estimated cost for procuring Trident is some £10·7 billion, which represents a total real cost saving of £2·8 billion against the original estimate. We were gratified that in its 1992 report on Trident, the Defence Select Committee commented on

"the gratifying and unusual spectacle of a major defence programme coming in far below estimate."

Construction of all four Trident submarines is progressing well.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister tells us that Trident is coming in below cost. But as he has never admitted what was in the original specifications, how can we tell that it is below cost?

Mr. Aitken: I said that it was below estimate, which is different from below cost, as most numerate hon. Members will understand. Even though the hon. Gentleman is a staunch opponent of all nuclear programmes and weapons, he should, at least on the basis of value for money for the taxpayer, be pleased that we have brought Trident in well below estimate.

Mr. Bennett: But the specifications have been cut.

Mr. Aitken: There is no question of the specifications being cut. Trident remains a formidable and decisive nuclear weapons system.

I am also pleased to tell the House that the construction of all four Trident submarines is progressing well. The first of class, Vanguard, successfully completed exhaustive and rigorous contractor sea trials earlier this year, and is planned to be accepted by the Royal Navy later this year. I had the honour earlier this year of laying the keel of SSBN 08, the fourth Trident submarine. I hope that that ceremony and the order that preceded it firmly underlined the Government's commitment to a four-boat Trident force. For only with a fourth boat can we be absolutely sure that over the lifetime of the force there will be at least one boat on patrol at sea at all times.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): There were some reports in the press about cracks in Vanguard during its trials. Can the Minister state categorically that that was not the case?

Mr. Aitken: The Vanguard sea trials were excellent in all respects except one minor matter of a sonar buoy which was lost due to a break of the towing equipment. We were completely satisfied with the inherent structure of Vanguard and its performance in the contractor sea trials, subject only to minor teething troubles which were of no major importance and are normal in contractor sea trials.

The Polaris submarine has served Britain well, providing continuous patrols for the past 25 years. We

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confidently expect that the Trident submarine will, with similar patrols, safeguard our national security for the next quarter of a century or more.

The commitments and operations that I have outlined make an impressive record of achievement. But there are other areas of activity in which the end of the cold war era has lightened the burden on our naval forces. The House will not expect me to go into details about the substantial anti-submarine warfare operations and preparations in which the Royal Navy regularly engaged during the times when we thought that we might conceivably one day have to do battle with the Soviet navy in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean or even the western approaches.

Mercifully those days are past. But as we cheerfully bring down the curtain on the old cold war era we must also accept, perhaps with a touch of sadness, that we now can do with a smaller Royal Navy to safeguard our vital security interests and to perform our foreseeable defence tasks.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): My hon. Friend has given a good exposition of the role and the requirements of the Royal Navy. One thing is puzzling me. I declare an interest. It is an emotional one rather than a financial one. I have a son who serves in the Royal Navy. That gives me the advantage that at least he keeps me up to date with what his friends think of our present policy—which I will not go into.

It is inevitable that one must take into account that resources will be concentrated on the Army and especially the infantry in view of what is happening in ex-Yugoslavia. Is my hon. Friend willing to say that, whatever happens in that direction, the Royal Navy will not suffer? I do not ask that for an emotional reason. The Royal Navy clearly has a role to fulfil. It is probably as stretched as it can be at present.

Mr. Aitken: I am certainly glad to confirm that the Royal Navy will not suffer in the sense that it will remain an absolutely pivotal component of our defence forces and I will give further details of that. Because of the very nature of the changing risks and the security environment, we will really need the capability that the Royal Navy provides superbly of mobility, reach and sustainability—the very qualities that I have tried to summarise in my speech. I hope that my hon. Friend and his son will be right in having confidence that we shall have such a navy in years to come.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I should like to probe that issue a little further. My hon. Friend is dealing with specific aspects of the Navy's activities such as Trident and other parts of the procurement programme. The country and serving naval personnel seek a clear update on policy since "Options for Change" which will give us a broader picture and understanding of what size navy is required. I do not believe that such an update has been adequately given at a strategic level.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend makes a fair point and we are responding to it, not least by holding this debate and listening to the voices of the House.

As I shall say later in my speech, we intend to publish, in the form of the White Paper on the Statement on the Defence Estimates for 1993, a full account of where all the services stand and where we think they will stand in terms of the equipment programme and the numbers, with more information than ever before. When my hon. Friend hears our plans, he will be satisfied that his question will be fully answered when that crucial and important document is published.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Porstmouth, North): In following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), will my hon. Friend assure us, without in any way seeking to forecast what will be included in the White Paper, that there is no suggestion that the reductions in manpower and ships will go beyond those forecast in "Options for Change"? That is the extreme. Can we have an assurance that we are not talking about going beyond it?

Mr. Aitken: If my hon. Friend will bear with me, he will hear clearly what our plans are and how they are linked, as they must be, to our commitments and operational tasks. That is precisely what "Options for Change" was all about. Some element of downsizing was forecast and we have been sticking to those forecasts. If there are any amendments to them, the place for those amendments to be published is the defence estimates.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The Minister is making play of the fact that we will have a White Paperr on the defence estimates for 1993. What happened to the debate on the defence estimates for 1992-93? Surely we should have had that debate before discussing the issues we are now debating.

Mr. Aitken: Those are matters for the usual channels and for the Leader of the House. No Minister can announce suddenly from the Dispatch Box that there will be a debate on a request from an Opposition spokesman. The hon. Gentleman is far too old a hand in Parliament not to know that. I shall make sure that his request is passed on to the usual channels.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I am sorry to labour the point raised by two of my hon. Friends, but my hon. Friend the Minister spoke rather ominously about something called the downsizing of the Royal Navy. Can we be absolutely clear on that? Will the Minister give an unequivocal undertaking at the Dispatch Box that there are no plans at present to go below the levels of manpower, vessels or funding envisaged in "Options for Change"? That was bad enough; if we are to go below it, it will be a matter of the greatest concern.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is asking for assurances which are too sweeping for any Minister to give. We have already announced some of the funding changes that have been made, such as public expenditure survey rounds and so on. On the key issue of numbers, in which I know he has a vital interest, I shall give some figures in my speech—if I am allowed to get on with it—but the definitive document with the maximum transparency within the limits of national security will be the White Paper to be published in July on the whole sweep of defence, including the Royal Navy. We thought that it was just as well to listen to voices in the House before making any such announcement.

Mr. Churchill: It will be the last day of term.

Mr. Aitken: No, it will not be the last day of term.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I appreciate my hon. Friend the Minister giving way as I know he wants to get on, but I should like to ask him a specific question that will not require him to give sweeping generalisations.

When the Army complained that they would be unable to expand operations in Bosnia, it was announced that two or three regiments would be saved. Can the Minister assure me that there will be no reduction in the Royal Navy budget to fund the saving of those regiments?

Mr. Aitken: The defence budget is a totality. We are not in the business of sacrificing one project to pay for another. It is not the adductory technique that my hon. Friend seems to envisage. We look at the totality of the defence budget and at our commitments and we either go to the Treasury or fit our commitments to our resources. There is no question of there being sacrificial lambs in the Navy or anywhere else in order to save regiments.

I am trying to turn to force restructuring, a matter on which I am being pressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The plans were initially set out in the White Paper, "Britain's Defence for the 1990s" and were elaborated in last year's White Paper. I sometimes wonder whether the Opposition ever read those careful blueprints for our future defence strategy.

I shall place one modest bet about the speech shortly to be made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) from the Opposition Front Bench. My bet is this: with the predictable if unsteady reliability of a Scotsman singing Auld Lang Syne on new year's eve, he will once again call on Her Majesty's Government to carry out a defence review.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): Absolutely right.

Mr. Aitken: I thought that I had got it right. This tired old siren song is the Labour party's all-purpose excuse for not having a defence policy of its own and we reject it.

A defence review means the reduction and reordering of our defence commitments and forces to match an externally imposed financial target. That is not what we are about; we are not engaged in a Denis Healey-style defence review with its Treasury driven imperatives to cut, cut and cut again.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I cannot see how the Minister can claim that "Options for Change" and its effect on the Royal Navy are not Treasury led. That certainly is the view of the Defence Select Committee and has been reinforced since then.

Mr. Aitken: The Select Committee does not have an absolute monopoly on accuracy and wisdom. We have frequently given the answer that it is a commitment—driven White Paper. To this day, we fit our forces to our commitments and operational roles. I know that various critics of the Government love to stick on the label Treasury driven. I can assure the hon. Gentleman—and I have said it time and again—that that is simply not a fully accurate picture.

I have done my best to spell out some of the changes in the security environment. If the major adversary of the country and our allies, the Soviet Union, has changed direction and become an ally, it is quite natural that there should be an alteration in our commitments and resources. That simple point does not seem to have been taken on board by all our critics.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Would the Minister like to tell the House, if he is so emphatic that it is not in any way the case that the present Government's policy is driven by the Treasury, why there was the announcement shortly before Easter that naval numbers were to be reduced yet again, from 55,000 to 50,000, when a White Paper is due in three months' time? What prompted that announcement, other than the Treasury?

Mr. Aitken: As I am about to tell the House, the announcement that the hon. Gentleman greeted with shock and surprise, as though it were something new, triggered by the Treasury, was always foreseen in the various "Options for Change" projections. I will now come, if I may, to the subject of redundancies because I know that there is understandable sensitivity on this.

In "Options for Change" we have re-examined our force posture in the light of the momentous change in the strategic environment which took place as a result of the collapse of communism in eastern Europe. This process was policy-driven, not resource-driven. What we are now doing, in the context of our annual re-costing of the defence programme, is developing a more extensive analysis and presentation of how the force structure and forward programme relate to our existing policy objectives, tasks and commitments throughout the world.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to report the results in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993", which will be published in July. When we publish SDE 93, I think and hope that it will be clear for the Navy, as for our other services, that while the resource constraints of the public purse, to which there has been so much reference, provide a healthy discipline to our plans for future force levels, nevertheless it remains the case that our commitments, and the operational environment of those commitments, drive the decision on our force levels and on our equipment programme.

It follows from what I have just said that as we restructure the Royal Navy we take all the relevant factors into account. We continue to keep naval manpower levels under review to ensure that numbers are sufficient to meet our requirements but also to ensure that we do not maintain them at artificially high levels. The post-"Options" Navy was planned to reduce to about 55,000 by the middle of the 1990s, and this remains our intention. However, we are moving to a fleet of younger, more efficient and less manpower-intensive ships. For example, a type 23 frigate needs approximately only two thirds of the crew of a type 22. As force levels reduce, we will be seeking a commensurate reduction in support infrastructure. By this I mean the more efficient and economical use of manpower, including civilianisation and contractorisation of support area functions. These, and market testing, will also contribute to a lower uniformed manpower requirement, which will inevitably decline.

We recognise that, in the difficult task of reducing manpower, we have a duty to act sensitively and fairly to the men and women of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary who have so well served their Queen and country. We have taken great care to ensure that, wherever possible, all steps short of redundancy, including the maximum use of manning regulators, have been used to effect the necessary manpower reductions. But the situation has been made more difficult by the fact that fewer people have been leaving the Navy during the past two years than would normally be the case—perhaps

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because of the recessionary environment. Indeed, application rates to leave the Navy are at a ten-year low. Some redundancies are therefore, sadly, unavoidable.

We made clear as long ago as 1991 that there would need to be a redundancy programme in the Navy arising out of "Options for Change", probably extending over three years. A total of 1,672 officers and ratings were made redundant in the first two phases of the programme. It is with great regret that we have recently had to announce the third phase of redundancies, involving up to 2,300 officers and ratings. The House should note, however, that in the first two phases of the Navy's redundancy programme we were able to achieve almost 90 per cent. of the necessary redundancies through voluntary applicants, and we are determined to meet as many as possible of the third phase of redundancies in the same way.

Such decisions are never easy, and we are doing our utmost to help those affected. I will not detain the House with details of what we believe are the reasonably generous redundancy and resettlement packages which we provide. As I have said, we greatly regret the necessity of any such redundancies, and our objective is to give the maximum help and assistance to all officers and ratings who are making the transition from service to civilian life.

Before moving on to equipment issues, I would like to say a few words about the royal dockyards which, I know, are a subject of considerable interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made clear on 9 February, we believe that all nuclear refit work should be concentrated at one dockyard, while we plan to continue with two dockyards, for reasons of competition, in non-nuclear refitting. My right hon. and learned Friend also said that much work remained to be done before further decisions could be taken, and that work is well under way. I should like to make it clear that no further decisions have been taken. We understand the desire in the local communities and the workforces for an end to the uncertainty, and we will make further announcements as soon as we can.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Is the Minister able to be a little more precise about that? He has in the past been a little more precise about when he expects a decision might be taken. As he appreciates, it is a matter of some concern for the communities of both Devonport and Rosyth, and it would be helpful if he could give a clearer indication of when he expects the decision to be made and announced.

Mr. Aitken: I can be no more precise than to say that it will be within the next few weeks. One of the problems is that the two royal dockyard management companies themselves frequently keep sending, sometimes in unsolicited form, new information which must be analysed by our experts and by Ministry of Defence staff. That is one of the reasons why these delays have occurred and why it has taken longer than we ourselves would have wished. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman would be the first to agree that it is better to take more time over a decision and get it right than to rush into one or give people the chance to say that their case has not been fully analysed or heard.

As to equipment, I have already said that good progress is being made with our plans to maintain a four-boat strategic nuclear deterrent under the Trident programme. In addition to the strategic deterrent, over the coming decade our fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, currently standing at 13 boats, will consist largely of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar class submarines which are being modernised with the latest sensors and command systems. We are currently considering options for the design of a new class of SSN, to succeed the Swiftsure class, which is based on the Trafalgar class and is planned to enter service around the turn of the century. The SSN force which will result will be well-armed, capable of deploying at high speed, and able to match the increasingly sophisticated submarine forces which are now being developed and sold world-wide.

The major diminution of the submarine threat from the former Soviet Union, which I mentioned earlier, has made it appropriate for us to examine the requirement for the Upholder. The primary role of the Upholder class conventionally-powered submarines was to patrol the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap against Soviet submarines, releasing SSNs for wider-ranging operations. The Upholders were ideal for this task and their relative lack of endurance and speed were not a disadvantage in the circumstance then envisaged for their operations. Our judgment on the future of the Upholders will be based on an assessment of the most likely future submarine operating patterns. No decisions have been taken as we are still evaluating the position in the way that I have just outlined.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will my hon. Friend tell the House if, in the whole history of the Royal Navy, any class of ship has been disposed of before it has entered service?

Mr. Aitken: I have not said that the Upholders will not remain in the fleet. We are considering all our options. I am afraid that I am not a sufficiently good naval historian to give my hon. Friend an immediate answer. I simply do not know if he is right or not. But he must not jump to conclusions from the outline of our current thinking that I have explained.

Our destroyer and frigate force, which is currently at a level of 40 warships, is now the youngest since the first world war with an average age of just 10 years. Six of the new type 23 anti-submarine warfare frigates have now been accepted into service and a further seven are currently being built at Jarrow and Swan Hunter. We plan to order more type 23 frigates, though we have not yet decided on the size and timing of these future orders. I am pleased to announce that we placed last week a contract for a further five type 23 command systems and associated on-board spares at a value of approximately £30 million. This equipment will process high volumes of combat data and will provide the Royal Navy with what we believe are the finest such systems in the world.

Our type 23 frigates will, with the Merlin EH101 helicopters, form a formidable anti-submarine warfare combination. We currently have 44 of these helicopters on order and good progress is being made on this contract. Together with our three aircraft carriers, two of which will be operational at any one time, we will continue to have the ability to make a significant contribution to NATO or other coalition warfare operations.

Our naval air assets on those carriers will also be significantly enhanced by the mid-life update of our Sea Harrier fighters with the state of the art Blue Vixen radar

and the advanced medium-range air-to-air missile known as AMRAAM. These enhancements, which are due to enter service next year, will enable the Harriers to engage multiple targets beyond visual range as well as having a look-down shoot-down capability.

Another new class of ship to enter service with the Royal Navy over the past two years has been the Sandown class single role minehunter. We now have four of these capable vessels in service, with a further one being built by Vosper Thornycroft. We plan to order further vessels of this class, and expect to be in a position to issue invitations to tender for the next batch shortly.

Mr. Colvin: When the new invitations go out to tender, will bids be permitted to include foreign hulls, as happened before? It seems to me monstrously unfair to British companies such as Vosper Thornycroft that foreign hulls should be included, often made by continental firms which are nationalised and subsidised by the relevant Governments; thus they present unfair competition to British companies. What other ship in the Royal Navy has its hull made overseas?

Mr. Aitken: We have an open procurement policy. About 91 per cent. of our prime contracts are won by British firms. It is often up to these prime contractors to arrive at their best judgment of what will meet our specifications and our value-for-money criteria. We do not interfere with their judgment; if they want to include a combination of foreign elements in their bids, we do not rule that out. Indeed, it would be excessively protectionist to do so.

Mr. Churchill: Although I do not ask my hon. Friend to be protectionist, does he agree that British firms have a right to be protected in the procurement process from unfair competition launched by firms which are nationalised and which benefit from subsidy in other countries? It would be monstrous if British firms went under because the Ministry of Defence accepted contracts from subsidised firms abroad.

Mr. Aitken: That is a fair point. When we consider bids we insist on fairness. If we decide that there has been unfair competition and massive foreign Government subsidy, or anything of that kind, we carefully take it into account, and it plays a key role in our decision making.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am sorry to take up more of my hon. Friend's time, but he mentioned 40 ships; and irrespective of comments about British manufacturers and shipbuilders, I should like to hear my hon. Friend categorically confirm that he has no plans to reduce that total of 40 ships simply because we cannot manufacture them cheaply enough in Britain for the Royal Navy to procure them.

Mr. Aitken: If my hon. Friend's point is the familiar one, to do with what "about 40 ships" means—whether it means between 35 and 45—this has been all around the houses in the Select Committee. We shall try to shed some light on it in the forthcoming White Paper.

In the context of future warship building, I should like briefly to refer to the Anglo-French frigate project, known as project Horizon, which Italy has now joined. We are now into an 18-month period of exploration, with France and Italy, of the prospects for collaboration on an anti-air warfare frigate to replace our type 42 destroyers around the turn of the century. This is a good example of international co-operation on the design and build of a ship, and it has many potential benefits, such as military interoperability, cost savings and the pooling of technical knowledge and capability. A provisional joint project office was set up here in London last November, and we anticipate that the memorandum of understanding for the full project management office will be signed soon.

Lastly, I turn to the subject of amphibious forces. We believe that this will be an important capability for the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy to excel in as we approach the new security environment of the 21st century. That is why we recently reaffirmed our commitment to provide the Royal Marines with modern and capable amphibious shipping by confirming that the new landing platform helicopter carrier remains firmly in our programme. Best and final offers for the LPH were received from Swan Hunter and VSEL on 22 April, and they are being evaluated against our normal technical and value-for-money criteria. This process is now close to completion, and we hope to be able to announce the results in the fairly near future.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My hon. Friend will be aware of my great desire that this order should go to Barrow, with the hull being built on the Clyde. The prospects of unemployment in Barrow as the submarine programme runs down are horrific, but the yard possesses great skills and the most modern naval shipbuilding technologies.

My hon. Friend has already said that the order will be placed on technical merit and value for money. Will he give the House an absolute undertaking that no other issue besides technical merit and value for money will be allowed to influence the order? Can he also be more specific about when the awarding of the contract will be announced?

Mr. Aitken: I can certainly confirm that we will make our decisions in accordance with our usual value-for-money and technical criteria. Of course we take some wider considerations into account, but the whole emphasis is on technical and value-for-money considerations.

I cannot go any further than I have already about the timing of the announcement. Since last I wrote to my right hon. Friend, saying that the announcement would be made much later in the year, we have been able to accelerate it to some extent, and I hope now to be able to make an announcement in the reasonably near future.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): In the Minister's first answer he said that financial and technical criteria would be those that counted; then, in his second, he said that other factors would be taken into account. Are there any circumstances in which these other factors could allow an order that was not the best in technical and financial terms to win the contract? This subject causes a great deal of concern not only in Barrow but in Govan, where it is hoped that the Kvaerner hull will be built for the new landing platform helicopter carrier.

Mr. Aitken: These exchanges have shown that hon. Members representing their constituents' interests have one abiding wish: that the Government will be seen to be scrupulously fair when awarding a major contract of this type. Fairness is our paramount consideration, and we will

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make our announcement at the right time, as soon as we can. I feel confident that the House will regard us as having played fairly with all parties.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my hon. Friend consider value for money in the context of the use of helicopter platforms on Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels and other container ships used so effectively during the Falklands war? Will he ensure that we have enough marine helicopters—and enough to be used by the Army and the RAF too in marine environments—and sufficient platform flexibility to give the Navy teeth? So often those teeth are provided by the helicopters. I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that he does not go for too many gold-plated solutions; rather, he should go for flexible solutions that ensure that we have a large number of helicopters to deploy when necessary.

Mr. Aitken: I share my hon. Friend's view that helicopters are crucial to future warfare. He is right about avoiding gold-plated solutions; we have tried to do that in in our amphibious programme. The LPH specifications are not gold-plated by warship standards of the past. Relatively speaking, they are not an over-expensive solution to the problem.

The new LPH will be the cornerstone of the Royal Navy's amphibious capability. Its main role will be to enable an amphibious landing force of up to 800 men to deploy ashore, by means of its embarked helicopters, in a single assault wave. Together with the replacements for our assault ships and the upgraded landing ships, this will provide the Royal Marines with the capable specialised shipping necessary to fulfil their role well into the next century.

Also on that subject I should mention that we are continuing to make progress towards replacing our two assault ships HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. The project definition phase for the replacement of those ships is continuing and the timing of an order will depend on the successful outcome of that process. On current plans the new ships will enter service around the end of the century. In addition to new ships, we also plan to upgrade our three older landing ships logistic with ship life extension programmes and we expect to be in a position to invite tenders for the first of these later this year.

I have detained the House perhaps almost too long, but on a quiet afternoon it may be right since this is the first Navy debate for two years to cover, as it were, the full horizon of Navy matters. Before I conclude, I apologise to the House for not being able to stay for the final speeches and the later part of this debate. I have to fulfil a long-standing engagement to appear on BBC "Question Time," and I thank the Opposition Front Bench and my hon. Friends for their forbearance and understanding of my later absence.

These are difficult and testing times for the Royal Navy as it adjusts to the much-changed but still dangerous strategic environment. Outside Russia and the United States of America, the Royal Navy is one of the largest and most capable, perhaps the most capable, navies in the world, with a fleet currently standing at three aircraft carriers, 40 destroyers and frigates, 13 nuclear submarines and four conventional submarines, supported by nine counter-measure vessels and some 20 ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Indeed, we spend some £6 billion a year on ensuring that our capability remains razor-sharp.

We are not, and could not in this environment, be complacent. The world has changed and is changing still. That is why we are taking time to decide in detail the way in which the Navy itself should change to reflect those circumstances. As I have emphasised, we intend to publish our detailed plans in this year's White Paper. We will, of course, take into account the opinions expressed in the House in the debate.

The Navy that results from that process may not be as large as in former days—the lines at the Spithead reviews may be shorter—but we remain committed to our Royal Navy fleet being capable, modern, well-equipped and ready for the challenges that the future may bring. Above all, we can take great pride in the professionalism, loyalty and excellence of the men and and women who serve in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. I think that there is respect and affection for the Royal Navy in the hearts of all the British people. For a medium-sized European power we are still a nation of supreme naval excellence. It might be a little over the top for a Minister of the Crown to begin each day, as Lord Curzon used to do, by singing "Rule Britannia" in his bath. Nevertheless, I hope I have convinced the House that the Royal Navy can still rule some waves with honour and distinction.

5.21 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Opposition also welcome the debate on the Royal Navy which, as the Minister conceded, is not before time. I should also like to associate the Opposition with the Minister's final remarks about the professionalism and loyalty of those who serve in the Royal Navy. There is no doubt about that in any part of the House and it is right that tributes should be paid.

We would also welcome a debate on the estimates, which is even longer overdue than a debate on the Royal Navy. That would enable us to take the wider look that is needed at our defence requirements and how best to meet them.

The Minister offered a bet. I did not take him up on it because he was right. We have been pressing for some time for a proper defence review, as have many other people —commentators, academics and people in the services, as well as representatives of all Opposition parties. We had defence reviews in 1957, between 1966 and 1968, between 1974 and 1975 and in 1981. There was an average interval of about seven years between them. There has not been a proper defence review for 12 years. During that time we have had the Falklands war, the end of the cold war, the Gulf war and the conflict in the Balkans. All those changes mean that we require an open debate and a strategic review of what personnel and equipment are needed to cope with the new threats and realities and how our contribution can complement those of other NATO countries.

The Select Committee on Defence—not just the Opposition—has said that instead of a proper defence review we have had an ad hoc, Treasury-driven series of thick salami slices, cuts off the defence budget, with the Navy bearing the brunt, as was emphasised at the hearing of the Select Committee only yesterday. Decision making

in the Ministry of Defence has been a secret and secretive exercise. David Bolton, the director of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, said:

"Defence is now too important to be left to silent debate."

It may be the silent service, but we want an open debate. Even Professor Norman Stone, someone with whom I do not usually associate, has said:

"The secrecy has offended even the Government's allies."

That secrecy ill befits the Minister who opened the debate who, as a Back Bencher, had an exemplary record as a champion of open government. It is indicative of the powerful effect that the Ministry of Defence has on Ministers when they go there; the Secretary of State himself is another perfect example.

At Question Time, when Opposition Members and Government Back Benchers have asked fair, straightforward questions about tactical air-to-surface missiles, the Upholder class submarines and other important issues, Ministers have often been evasive and sometimes been obstructive. It has been left to the Select Committee—to their credit, members of the Select Committee are here today—to take an overview and to extract information from Ministers and officials, although my colleagues tell me that it has been like getting blood from a stone.

As my colleagues know, I am always an optimist—the eternal optimist——

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): One needs to be, in the Labour party.

Mr. Foulkes: One needs to be when one is in the Labour party; the hon. Gentleman is right.

At the weekend, I came across what I thought was a dramatic announcement in a Ministry of Defence press release. Like the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), I get all of them. It said:

"Archie Hamilton, MP, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, said today that the Ministry of Defence is to conduct a review".

Mr. Foulkes: At last—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is very perceptive. At last, there is to be a review, not of defence strategy or of our requirements for defence, but of all the Ministry's historic buildings. That will be very useful. Of course, the Minister of State will be seconded to the Department of National Heritage. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will call him before the Select Committee on National Heritage and commend him, but that should not be the top priority of the MOD today.

I expect that most of the debate will be characterised by the widespread concern about the uncertain future faced by the Royal Navy, uncertainty which is the result of a lack of Government decisiveness and strategy. There is a feeling that the Royal Navy will lose out most in the continuing round of defence cuts, as the Select Committee found yesterday. We understand that the high-profile demands of United Nations operations, which we support, have placed greater strain on the Army and the Royal Air Force, but the Navy is important and vital. There is no such thing as a military operation with just one wing of the armed forces. The presence of the Ark Royal in the Adriatic is a clear reminder of that.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): How does the hon. Gentleman equate his anguishing about Navy force levels with the declared intention of his party at the general election to reduce defence spending by £7 billion a year? That is the equivalent of maintaining the Navy, the Army or the Air Force.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Lady has misunderstood the position. That point has been raised on several occasions. It was not in the manifesto. I think that the hon. Lady is referring to a decision of the party conference to which other Conservative Members have referred. It raises an important question of comparative defence cuts. I quote:

"Parallels can be found throughout the western world which show that substantial savings can be made on defence and they are appropriate at the present time."—*[Official Report*, 2 June 1992; Vol. 208, c. 697-98.]

That is not my quotation; that was said by the Secretary of State in the House. We recognise that in the long term there must be a peace dividend, but we also accept that we have commitments to Northern Ireland, the Falklands, Hong Kong and Belize, as the Minister rightly said. We also make it clear that any cuts must be made after a complete defence review; we should not have the wild, random slashes that are being made by the Government. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam for raising that matter.

I was dealing with the presence of the Ark Royal in the Adriatic and, therefore, the importance of the Navy, which will play a key role in future international operations. It may use its amphibious capability or it may enforce sanctions or a blockade, which will be increasingly necessary in relation to Bosnia, or it may carry out drug patrols in the Caribbean, an operation that the Minister rightly identified.

The Navy's strategic role has already changed and there must be full discussion of the priorities of our naval forces in the post-cold war era. The Minister spoke about activity around the Kola peninsula in relation to the Upholder class. Is that activity still a priority or do we need to focus on bluer waters now that the Soviet threat has ended?

One of the many reasons for a defence review is to examine what sort of naval forces Britain, which currently has the fourth largest navy in the world, can afford to maintain. Bearing in mind our responsibilities, especially in NATO and the United Nations, we must also discover those capabilities that we cannot afford to lose. Those two need to be reconciled and only a comprehensive defence review can do that. However, there is no comprehensive information from the Government, just a series of leaked stories seemingly emanating from within the Ministry of Defence. In that context, it was a bit rich at a previous Question Time for the Minister to characterise the Opposition as plumbers chasing leaks, because those leaks seem to result from the disarray in his Ministry.

The Minister tended to dismiss a little lightly the size of the frigate and destroyer force. "Options for Change" suggested a force of about 40 ships, but the Minister said that there were exactly 40. Is it exactly 40? *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Minister will tell us the figure in his reply. We are told to wait for the White Paper, which is rather like waiting for Godot. The evidence taken yesterday by the Select Committee and the comments by hon. Members suggest that there will be about 35 vessels. That means that the operational total may be as low as 30 because some vessels will be undergoing refits. The rumoured sale of the type 21 frigates and the recent announcement about the reduction in Navy manpower seem to support the Select Committee's prediction.

[Mr. Foulkes]

Some hon. Members, including Conservative Members, have spoken about the method used to announce reductions in Navy manpower, and I cannot let the matter pass without some comment. I have read on a number of occasions that the Navy is now into stealth technology, but so are Ministers in their methods of making announcements. A major announcement about reductions in Navy manpower was sneaked out in a written answer just before the Easter recess. Ministers knew that on the day following that answer, a Friday, there would be a rail strike and that not many people would be around. Ministers announced in a statement in the House that there had been a change of mind on Army manpower and that the number would be reduced by 3,000 fewer than they originally intended. However, the intention to slash Navy manpower by 5,000 was revealed in a written answer.

Mr. Wolfson: I intervene not to support the Opposition's defence policy but to record my extreme dissatisfaction and that of my constituents about the way in which that announcement was made.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is a respected Member of the House. He is right. The Minister said that the White Paper would be issued in July and there was some jocularity about that being at the end of term. I hope that that trick will not be played on us again. As we have heard, the White Paper is crucial and it should not be left to the fag end of the Session when everyone is about to go on holiday.

The Government must clarify the size of the surface fleet. They say that that information will be contained in the White Paper and I hope that that document will set out the exact size. When speaking about the type 42 destroyers, the Minister rightly referred to the encouraging co-operation with France and Italy on the future frigate. We need to know exactly how many there will be. Press reports have suggested that there will be eight such vessels to replace the 12 type 42s, but we need to know the exact position.

The Minister rightly said that, in the changed climate of world security, amphibious capability is becoming even more crucial. International responses on peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention greatly benefit from the flexibility of amphibious forces. We welcome the decision to confirm the order for the landing platform helicopter vessel. The helicopter carrier is a vital part of the maintenance of an amphibious capability and it is necessary for the long-term future of the Royal Marines. As an hon. Member wickedly suggested a few days ago, without that carrier the marines might have to go by bus or train.

Thousands of shipbuilding jobs depend on the contract for that carrier. At this point in my speech, I intended to criticise the Minister, but I now have to say that I welcome the fact that a decision for the placing of that contract will be announced later this month. That is an encouraging step and will remove some of the uncertainty.

Mr. Davidson: The conference of the Scottish Conservative party is about to take place. As it is unlikely to have much good news for Scotland, does my hon. Friend agree that the announcement about the order for the helicopter landing ship would be appropriate for that event?

Mr. Foulkes: I prefer all such announcements to be made in the House rather than at party conferences. In any case, the Scottish Conservative party conference will be preoccupied with the Scottish people's march for jobs and democracy which, when the marchers arrive there, will convey an important message to that conference.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is part of that march for jobs an expression of the hon. Gentleman's desire to sit on the Treasury Bench, a desire that never seems to materialise?

Mr. Foulkes: It has not materialised so far, but the hon. Gentleman does everything that he can to make it happen and I am grateful to him for that.

I should like to ask about other amphibious elements. The Minister spoke about the landing platform dock replacements which are just as important to the future of the amphibious capability as the LPH. The Minister said that Intrepid and Fearless can remain until the end of the century. That is an optimistic assessment. Perhaps the Minister of State could clarify the time scale for those docks.

There is further confusion about submarines. Once again, the Minister was rather coy about the Upholder class submarines about which the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) asked him a telling question. As they say in the world of football transfers, as Graeme Souness knows to his cost, and tabloid gossip, the Upholder class has been heavily linked with Canada. That would be a significant sale because not only would a totally new class of submarine be sold before it entered service —which, I understand, would be the first time that that has ever happened, although the Minister was not sure about that—but it would involve vessels costing more than £800 million when training and infrastructure investments were included. If the submarines are to be sold or even if such a sale has been considered or discussed with Canada, the House should be told about it and the Government should come clean.

The overriding impression among Opposition Members, people and the media is that the sole reason for the sale is not that Upholders are no longer required for our strategic capability but that the Government badly need the money for other promised procurement projects. How many other new projects will be hived off to fund the continuing procurement requirement? To sell the Upholders is a major strategic decision which needs to be reported to the House. They should not simply be sold off, flogged off, to raise hard cash. I hope that the Minister of State will give us a straight answer about those submarines.

That brings me to the issue of defence sales.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of submarines, I have a question for him. Just before the last general election, Labour's policy on nuclear submarines was that it would review the need for the fourth Trident submarine. Would the hon. Gentleman take the opportunity, now that we are already building the fourth Trident submarine, to say that Labour party policy now is to support the nuclear deterrent and have a four-boat fleet?

Mr. Foulkes: The fourth Trident has been completed and we accept that as a fait accompli. I shall deal in a little more detail in a few minutes with some of the wider aspects of our nuclear deterrent.

The Upholder class sale is a clear sign that the Royal Navy is not exempt from what a recent National Audit Office report described as a sell-off of British military equipment on

"a scale unprecedented since the period following the second world war"

in what seems in some cases to be a bargain basement sale. The Minister may be aware that the same report suggested that taxpayers' money had been lost by not getting the best prices in previous equipment sales and that the director of sales had not carried out adequate studies to achieve the best prices in the international market. The report stated:

"the directorate has insufficient information . . . to know whether they are covering their costs."

I should be interested to hear from the Minister of State for the Armed Services what the Government intend to do to remedy the inefficiencies highlighted in that report. In a recent sale at Rosyth, equipment worth many thousands of pounds—some of it new and some of it used—was sold to a private dealer for £1. That is not getting the best value for money out of a sale of assets that cost thousands of pounds. If the Minister cannot do so now, I hope that at some time he will respond to that report.

It appears from all the replies that we have had that the Government are persisting in setting the ceiling on the number of warheads carried by Trident submarines at 128 per boat, giving a possible overall total of 512, compared with the 192 warheads that would be carried if the numbers remained the same as we have on Polaris. Why are the Government insisting on that acceleration in the growth of our nuclear arsenal? The only conclusion to be drawn from their blanket statement that 512 will be the maximum is that that number of warheads will be deployed.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces is shaking his head. I hope that he will deal with the point more explicitly than that.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: That is the maximum.

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, but that maximum would not be minimum deterrence. It would be an unnecessary escalation, and it goes against article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty, to which we are a signatory. I ask the Minister to give a categoric statement that the warhead level will not be greater than 192.

I hope that I will be allowed to indulge myself and raise a matter in which I have been personally involved for a number of years——

Dr. Reid: Fishing nets.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is way ahead of me. I am concerned about fishing nets being snagged by submarines. That has resulted in several tragedies. Recently, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has been helpful in these matters.

Dr. Reid: Not at first.

Mr. Foulkes: No, not initially, but he has been helpful recently. I hope that he will tell me two things in his reply. First, will he give a report on the current situation with regard to the tests taking place on the transponders, commonly known as pingers, which are attached to boats and nets to warn submarines of the presence of fishing vessels? I understand that trials are taking place. The fishing boat of a constituent of mine, Howard McCrindle, is being used in those trials. How are they progressing and what hopes does the Minister have for the deployment of those pingers?

Secondly, will the Minister reaffirm the commitment of the Ministry of Defence to Subfacts, a scheme which has been doing invaluable work in warning fishing boats about submarine movement? The Minister introduced it after representations from hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). It has been working extremely well. It is rather unfortunate that comments attributed to the chief coastguard have undermined the scheme and denied the use of coastguard facilities to broadcast the information. I am sure that no one, least of all the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, would want a repeat of the Antares tragedy. I hope, for that reason, that the scheme will be continued and expanded in other areas.

I was grateful for the fact that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement mentioned the royal dockyards. We look forward to the Government's decision on the Trident refit contract. Indeed, we have been looking forward to it for some time—only a little longer than we have been looking forward to the defence estimates debate. We have had the most absurd and damaging indecision on the issue. A decision was expected after the election, then by last autumn, then by the end of last year. Then by the end of last year we were reliably informed by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces then it would come by the end of January, then it was to be before Easter and now we are told to expect it this month.

Mr. Bill Walker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again. I trust that when he is making such comments he will bear in mind that many of his colleagues and I went to see my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench and convinced them to review the matter properly and fully. In considerable measure, that has been the reason for the Government's delay in making a decision, and for that I am grateful.

Mr. Foulkes: I would have hoped that the Ministry of Defence would undertake all that without the need for representations from the hon. Gentleman, or other hon. Members. One of the ironies of the announcement was that the Government proclaimed that both yards needed to be kept open to preserve competition. The privatised management competition led to a desperate bidding process for the Trident contract and ultimately resulted, as the hon. Member for Tayside, North will recall, in the Government's startling concession that the tenders

"may significantly understate the likely eventual cost of the work".

What strategic sense does such a ridiculous process make? The Opposition have consistently argued that both sites must be kept open and that the only effective way to do that is by guaranteeing a core programme of work. If we lose one of the yards, it will be not only a tragedy for the community concerned but result in a major strategic loss in capacity for the defence industry. That is why it needs to be looked at in a strategic, overall sense and not as competition, part of which has turned out to be a farce.

It would be wrong not to mention the merchant shipping and the shipbuilding industries. The decline in the British merchant fleet was underlined by the fact that only

[Mr. Foulkes]

a small number of its ships were chartered during the Gulf war; the rest had to come from overseas—a situation very different from that of the Falklands war. Leaving aside the investigation into an alleged fraud ring in the Ministry of Defence—that matter needs to be pursued—it is of real concern that the number of merchant ships is so low.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement assured us last June that the situation is not yet drastic. Perhaps he will act soon to ensure that it does not become drastic. There has been a similar decline in the shipbuilding industry. Defence cuts inevitably mean that thousands of jobs have and will be lost. Skilled professional people such as draughtsmen, electricians and engineers will go when such skills need to be preserved for the sake of our manufacturing industry. It is a shameful admission that the Government have no policy to assist diversification in the defence industry. The lack of Government direction is making things much worse than they should be. That aspect cannot be left to individual private enterprise and to the marketplace. We will continue to call for the establishment of a defence diversification industry, to ensure strategic planning.

At VSEL in Barrow, for example, 7,000 jobs, or half the work force, have already been lost in the brief period that has elapsed since "Options for Change". The effect on such a community, isolated as it is from other opportunities for employment, is devastating.

The stark fact is that, although the shipbuilding industry is still the main employer in some areas, total output is only one quarter that at the peak levels for the new shipbuilding giants in the far east. Our shipbuilding work force numbers 35,000—not the hundreds of thousands employed in the past. If the Government do not act soon to halt that decline, our shipbuilding industry will be in a very sorry state.

When analysing Government defence policy, we adopt the maxim that what the Government say is not what the defence forces get. On 4 February 1992, the then Secretary of State for Defence told the House:

"We believe that the world is passing through a period of considerable instability and therefore we do not propose further reductions in our defence forces."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1992; Vol. 203, c. 123.]

Since then, naval manpower has been cut by almost a further 10 per cent. It was envisaged that we would have a destroyer and frigate force of around 40—but now it seems possible, although we shall have to wait for the White Paper, that the number will be nearer 35 and the operational total down to 30. "Options for Change" planned a submarine force reduced from 29 to 16, but now the MOD is preparing for 12 at most.

Mr. Hargreaves: The hon. Gentleman will recall that I raised that issue with my hon. Friend the Minister. As a number is to go into this famous White Paper, for which we must all wait, will the hon. Gentleman give the number that the Opposition think appropriate?

Mr. Foulkes: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has been present since the beginning of the debate, but I made it clear earlier that the number would be discussed in the review—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for Defence—my good friend—is laughing. We are saying that there needs to be a review of strategic needs and requirements, so that the manpower and equipment necessary to deal with them can be determined. We are seeing instead salami cuts from the Treasury. If we have the LPH, will we have to sell off the Upholder class to pay for it?

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The hon. Gentleman keeps calling on the Government to conduct a defence review, to reach conclusions. Is he saying that the Labour party has not conducted its own internal review of defence policy—that it has no views at all on the Royal Navy, Army and Air Force, the size of each of those services and any changes that should be made? If Labour does have views, why have we not been given the benefit of learning of them?

Mr. Foulkes: Of course we are looking at a review within our limited resources, but I pledge that if the right hon. and learned Gentleman will make available to us all the Ministry of Defence's resources, we will not only conduct a defence review but publish it.

Mr. Rifkind: But until then, Labour does not have any views.

Mr. Foulkes: Of course we have opinions and views, but we cannot propose specific numbers until we have discussed the matter. I made clear the need to review the Upholder class and certain requirements. There is an important debate under way about grey-water and blue-water deployment, and we want to take part. It should, however, be an open and straightforward discussion, not the kind of secret discussion that is currently under way.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: In the last part of the hon. Gentleman's speech, did he have in mind the remarks made in 1976 by Sir Ian Gilmour, as he then was, as shadow Minister of State for Defence? He told the House that it was unrealistic for Opposition parties to seek a detailed defence policy because they did not have access to the necessary information. He pointed out that when an Opposition party came into office, it had to discuss such matters with our allies, the defence industry and the services before it was possible to create a cohesive defence policy—in fact, a review.

Mr. Foulkes: I am most grateful to the hon. and learned Member, and I hope that his help will not do his party any harm in today's local government elections in England.

Mr. Campbell: Not in Newbury, anyway.

Mr. Foulkes: The axe is poised over a wide range of other projects. I refer to the Tornado mid-life upgrade, the Challenger 1 upgrade and the replacement of Bloodhound. I hope that we will know more in the great White Paper that is to be published, but given the MOD's track record, I sometimes have my doubts—as we say in Scotland.

We welcome some cuts. The suggestion that the tactical air-to-surface missile—TASM—will be scrapped is something for which Labour has been arguing for a considerable time. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will confirm that that will happen. Nevertheless, we object to month-by-month uncertainty, the ad hoc nature of force reduction, the lack of any direction in defence policy and the unwillingness during a period of massive global upheaval to contemplate the full strategic analysis that our nation's security role and requirements demand. There is a lack of basic consistency and decisiveness in

Government policy. It is not crisis management but crisis mismanagement. The Royal Navy in particular is being run down and is suffering because there has been no strategic review.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman appears to be reaching the end of his speech, but earlier he promised to make clear Labour's policy on retaining the nuclear deterrent. Although he mentioned that he agreed with keeping four submarines, another part of Labour policy has been to negotiate away our nuclear deterrent, and we know that Labour party conferences tend to say that they do not want nuclear weapons at all. Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear that Labour is now in favour of keeping a nuclear deterrent?

Mr. Foulkes: I made it clear that we accept four submarines as a fait accompli, but that we oppose any escalation in the number of warheads, which we want to keep at 192. I make it clear also that if other countries were to dispense with their nuclear weapons, we would not want to retain nuclear weapons. That seems manifestly sensible.

As I want to give other right hon. and hon. Members an opportunity to contribute, I shall conclude. I resent the criticism that is sometimes made by Ministers—although only once tonight—that we are deficient in our resolve to defend our country. Labour Members represent the men and women who fought for this country in successive conflicts, who cook for those who fight, repair vehicles, fly planes and sail the ships. At a recent careers convention at Cumnock academy, young men and women again told me of their worthwhile ambitions to join the Royal Navy, Army or Air Force, and we want them to have the opportunity to do so.

Of course, we seek, above all, political solutions to conflicts or potential conflicts, wherever they may be—Northern Ireland, Belize, the Falklands, Bosnia or elsewhere. Political solutions will allow us to reduce the percentage of our gross national product that is spent on defence—and all other countries wish to do the same. Meanwhile, the Opposition yield to no one in our support for what is necessary to protect our democracy and our way of life.

5.58 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I confess that I am always somewhat reluctant to participate in debates on subjects of which many right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House clearly have greater knowledge than me. I cannot claim to be a so-called defence expert. On the other hand, perhaps it is refreshing and helpful occasionally to hear the views of a lay person. It is in that context that I shall make a few remarks.

When preparing my comments, one word repeatedly came to mind—uncertainty. That recurring theme manifested itself, whether in respect of Britain's defence requirements and capabilities over the next 20 years or more, or in relation to decisions that have been made or will have to be made about the Royal Navy and their impact on the south-west region and the Plymouth travel-to-work area in particular—part of which includes my constituency.

We were all excited when the Berlin wall came down—it symbolised the ending of the cold war—and subsequent events in the former Soviet Union and former communist states of eastern Europe also caught our imagination. Yet few, if any, could have predicted the sequence of events that subsequently took place. Before that there was a certain predictability—I hesitate to use the word "cosiness"—but in practice both the western world and the east knew where they stood. Since the Berlin wall came down, that situation has been replaced by uncertainty and increasing instability, particularly in parts of Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Initially, we talked about the peace dividend—the Government produced "Options for Change"—but I must confess that I now find myself repeatedly asking where it will all lead. What are the United Kingdom's defence objectives and responsibilities for the early part of the 21st century? What strategy will we pursue and, following from this, what defence capability will we require, particularly in the context of this debate, as far as the Royal Navy is concerned? I sometimes wonder whether the Government, and the Ministry of Defence in particular, are clear in their own mind about their responsibilities and objectives.

We have had a series of decisions about requirements, capabilities, sizes and many other issues, but I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that, taken collectively, they seem to me, as a layman, hardly to add up to a clearly defined defence strategy, especially—and reference has already been made to this—when Ministers decide to make announcements about further reductions in the Royal Navy's manpower requirements on the eve of the Easter recess. I was telephoned at 4.30 on Maundy Thursday and, as a Member of Parliament representing a defence constituency, was put in the embarrassing position of having to defend my own Government's decision-making process. Of course, that situation will apply to us all from time to time.

Manpower levels are of particular interest to me because HMS Raleigh is located in my constituency. HMS Raleigh is the shore base where all the non-officer intake into the Royal Navy, both male and female, undertake their initial training. Any announcement about Royal Navy manpower requirements will obviously have direct consequences for HMS Raleigh and the Torpoint community. I must emphasise to my right hon. Friend the Minister—and I do not exaggerate—the number of times in recent months that Royal Navy personnel and their families have approached me to seek clarification of the Ministry of Defence's intentions. That uncertainty—I come back to that word—is very worrying.

Devonport dockyard and the Royal Navy base are situated across the River Tamar from my constituency. We all know that Plymouth is a major garrison city; more than 2,000 of our United Kingdom marine force are based in Plymouth. I should add that more than 20 per cent. of the work force in the various Plymouth defence establishments are my constituents. There are also those who are employed directly in other activities or rely indirectly on defence-related enterprises.

Anxieties are steadily mounting—many have been aired this afternoon—about the delays that have occurred in essential decision-making processes concerning the future size, location and function of Royal Navy activities. There is uncertainty over the location of the United Kingdom Trident refit facility: that is obviously top of the list as far as the Plymouth travel-to-work area is concerned. There are uncertainties about the future size of our surface fleet and the location of its base. At present, 26 surface ships are Devonport-based and various categories of submarine are based at Plymouth.

[Mr. Robert Hicks]

I hope that, if nothing else comes out of this debate —and regardless of party membership—this point will be made to Ministers. Of course, we must make the right decisions, but delay causes further uncertainty and unease, and we should try to avoid that. One scenario that has been suggested lately is that, for example, by 1997 the Plymouth naval base—including the dockyard—could be significantly reduced, if not closed, if the Trident contract were awarded to Rosyth. The surface fleet, for example, could be moved to Portsmouth and all submarines could be based at Faslane. I am not suggesting that this is likely to occur, but the longer there are delays in making essential decisions, the more this kind of speculation will increase. I am not in any way deliberately playing up the anxiety; I merely say that that is being suggested. If it were to happen, it would have a devastating impact on the Plymouth travel-to-work area.

Uncertainty has been created locally by the delays, in particular those affecting Trident. Implicit in my remarks —and the Minister already knows my position on this—is my belief that it is essential not only for us to have a decision on the Trident refit facility soon, but for that facility to be located at Devonport. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) outlined the sequence of events; we are almost 12 months on from when we were initially led to believe that a decision was about to be made. We all know that slippages can occur for genuine reasons, but I think that we are beginning to exhaust our excuses on that point.

Ministers have also stated that this difficult and crucial decision will be taken on the basis of the defence needs of the United Kingdom and value for money. I believe that on both counts Devonport's case has been proved. Devonport has an advantage in respect of the initial capital outlay; furthermore, the dockyard offers an extensive co-located naval base for both surface ships and submarines, and offers significant unit cost savings for the future.

Of course, wider social and economic considerations arise from the decision, but it is a fact that the south-west region of the United Kingdom is the most heavily dependent on defence and defence-related industries. There are the employment considerations. We have already lost 6,200 jobs in Devonport in the past six years. The naval base and the dockyard put £520 million annually into the local economy. In addition, 600 local companies receive contracts annually from the dockyard. These arguments are relevant to any defence location, but they are particularly relevant to Plymouth because of its historic connection with defence and defence-related industries.

As for the political considerations, this is not the right time to raise them with Ministers. I rest my case on the belief that Devonport is Britain's most significant naval complex. Geographically, it is the best placed complex in the United Kingdom for access to deep water and rapid response. In addition, Devonport comes out best in terms of offering greater efficiency and lower unit operating costs. I look to Ministers to end our prolonged period of uncertainty as quickly as possible.

6.10 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I was very interested in the reply given to me today by a Foreign Office Minister about the number of conflicts in the world. The Minister did not suggest how many conflicts the Foreign Office recognises. He simply suggested that the United Nations recognises that at least 25 wars or conflicts, in one form or another, are going on in the world today, and that the United Nations has a peacekeeping role, or is attempting a peacekeeping role, in 12 of those 25 wars or conflicts. Any debate about our defence requirements must take that fact into account. We should remember that the horrors of Bosnia, reported on television, are being repeated in many of those other wars. It is just that the TV cameras are not there. We ought to be as horrified about the horrors of those other wars as we are about Bosnia.

I was disappointed, therefore, that the Minister did not set our Royal Navy requirements in the context of what we are doing to try to reduce the number of conflicts in the world. He did not tell us how far we intend to co-operate with the United Nations in its peacekeeping roles, or whether the Royal Navy has a role to play in trying to prevent us from getting drawn into one of those conflicts, or saving us from some other conflict.

It is sad that the Government have not been prepared to carry out a proper defence review. As they have not been prepared to do that, the House of Commons procedures for debating defence matters are in a chaotic state. It would have been far better to have a proper defence review and, following it, a debate in the House.

Even though the Government were not prepared to do that, they cannot be excused for not having provided time for a two-day debate on the estimates. If they had provided such an opportunity, Members could have argued the case as to how far, if we are to meet in particular our United Nations role, we would have been better served by allocating resources to one part as opposed to another part of our defence capability. That debate should have taken place.

Instead, there have been a few of the debates that are supposed to take place each year on the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force—if you like, housekeeping debates. The Royal Air Force debate was not particularly satisfactory. For all sorts of very good reasons, most of the debate was devoted to Bosnia.

Mr. Wilkinson: And Iraq.

Mr. Bennett: Yes, Iraq as well.

It was not a satisfactory Royal Air Force debate. Other issues were brought into it. We now need a proper series of debates in the House of Commons, leading up to the defence estimates. We need a two-day debate on last year's estimates. Then we need the estimates and the statement upon them. After that, we ought to be provided with the opportunity for a debate before the summer recess so that all these issues can be thoroughly analysed in the House of Commons.

I was amused by the Minister's claim that the Government had been candid about nuclear issues. I accept that, on a few occasions, we have managed to prise just a little information out of Ministers, but it is extremely unsatisfactory that certain defence correspondents are

briefed by the military with information that is far more authoritative and clear than that which the Government are prepared to give to us.

Since 1945, neither end of the political spectrum has ever told the House of Commons the truth about Britain's nuclear role. However, they have had to leak some information in order to try to give credibility to the deterrent. The Government ought to adopt a totally new approach. There should be full disclosure to Parliament, so that hon. Members can understand to what extent our defence resources are still being skewed towards spending too much on our nuclear capability as opposed to our conventional capability.

The Minister told us today that the Trident programme expenditure came within the estimates, but we do not know whether that is true, because we have never been told how many missiles we shall get. Unless we are given that information, we cannot know whether, in order to stay within the expenditure target, the Trident system has steadily been whittled down. If the Minister wants to claim credit for good budgeting, he should at least be honest with the House of Commons and tell us whether we are getting what was originally envisaged, or something that has been substantially scaled down.

Instead of clear information to the House of Commons about what is happening to the Trident and tactical air-to-surface missile programmes during the past few months, there has been a series of Government leaks. It is possible to pick out a series of briefings that could not have been made up by defence correspondents. They were clearly offered either by Ministers, or senior civil servants, or people in the Ministry of Defence. Why cannot the House of Commons be told exactly what is happening to the Trident programme? Is TASM to be scrapped?

If this is the mother of Parliaments, we ought to be able to debate these issues. If they were debated in such secrecy that no foreign Government had a clue about what was going on, I might be able to understand the argument, but it does not happen like that. Since we want the deterrent to work, for all sorts of reasons—including the technical ability to observe what is going on—most major foreign Governments can find out exactly what is going on in this country. The only people who are denied that information are the British electorate, who might have a view as to whether they are getting good value for money. There ought to be openness about nuclear policy aims in a democratic country.

What is even more important is that we signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. I understand that, between 10 and 14 May, there is to be a meeting in New York as a preliminary to the 1995 review of the treaty. Most people feel that it is unsatisfactory. Some countries that signed it said that they would not develop nuclear weapons. Then they went ahead and developed them.

Our commitment to that treaty is not to increase our nuclear capability and to work towards reducing it. How can we take part in those preliminary discussions, in the hope of achieving a more effective non-proliferation treaty, if we are not prepared to tell the world what our intentions are about the warheads that will go on Trident? How will other countries be able to tell whether we are cheating on the treaty and committing ourselves to an expansion of our nuclear capability? How can we demand openness from other Governments if we do not provide it ourselves? If we want to make progress on non-proliferation, there must be more openness about our own requirements.

I am not a great believer in deterrents, although the Government certainly are. The only way to deter people is to give some idea of one's capability. Originally, the idea was that Trident was the last resort to deter Russian—or, as it then was, Soviet—aggression, so I understand that we do not need to develop it much further.

However, we are now being told that, by slightly rearranging the warheads of the Trident programme, we may be able to use them against a minor or semi-power which wants to develop a nuclear capability. Surely, if one believes in a deterrent, it is much better to spell out what we are capable of and warn countries that we may be prepared to use ours. As long as there is uncertainty, there is little chance of any system acting as a deterrent. It would be better to place all the emphasis on non-proliferation rather than trying to develop a new role for deterrence.

More honesty is needed about our special relationship with the United States, which the Tory party likes to trot out. Basically, if we want to keep a nuclear weapons system, we are dependent on the United States for the Trident missiles. As long as we are dependent, we do not have an independent deterrent and cannot be wholly independent in foreign policy terms.

It is very easy for the Americans to lean on us and say that perhaps the missiles should cost a little more, which is extremely embarrassing for the Government. It is not said formally that, if we do not support the United States policy in Bosnia, it will increase the price of the missiles, but that is the informal aspect of our special relationship. It would be better to make it clear to what extent we are still dependent on the United States for Trident, how vulnerable we are to a change in its policy, and how it can help to determine our foreign policy.

A question mark hangs over our role in the United Nations Security Council. Are we a permanent member because we are a nuclear power? Do we have a veto because we are a nuclear power? The issue should be discussed openly because, in terms of our economic clout in the world, it is hard to justify our continuing in that role. In view of the changes taking place in the world, there should be far more openness about the role of nuclear deterrence in the Royal Navy and in defence policy in general.

Polaris is clearly coming to the end of its days. One of the submarines has already been taken out of service, as have other nuclear-powered submarines. The United States has also taken a substantial number of nuclear-powered submarines out of service, and we hear some pretty horrible tales about what is happening to nuclear-powered submarines in the Soviet Union.

It is very important that someone develops a strategy for the effective decommissioning and making safe of the old reactors and boats. I should have thought that jobs could be created. It is sad that we have so much expertise in shipbuilding for military and transport purposes but that we are not trying to use some of it to develop a decommissioning policy, which could be important for this country and also contribute substantially to making the world a much safer place.

In the next few months, I hope that the Government will concede that we need a properly costed defence review, so that we can have a more effective debate in the House about defence implications. I hope that, at long last, the

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Government will show some honesty about the costs of their nuclear policy and how we can use it to try to make the world a safer place.

6.24 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I welcome the debate, because, as has already been said, for the past two years the House has not had the opportunity to discuss Royal Navy affairs, and it is high time it did. The debate is timely, because the Select Committee on Defence is conducting an investigation into the Royal Navy. For the past two weeks, we have taken oral evidence, and we shall be reporting our conclusions to the House before the summer recess.

The Committee has completed its investigation into the Trident programme, and I can assure the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that we found nothing in the Trident programme to cause us serious concern in terms of its timing or its safety, which I know is a matter of particular concern to him. In due course, I hope that he will learn from our report that the undertakings and assurances given by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement are accurate and that the Trident programme is progressing entirely as it should.

Mr. Bennett: Are we going to get as many missiles as originally envisaged?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not want to pre-empt our report, but I can say that the evidence given to us was that Trident can be equipped with that number of missiles, although it does not have to be, and that it would be possible to load it with fewer missiles; so perhaps the hopes expressed by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will be fulfilled. I have no doubt that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will deal with that issue when he winds up.

The debate is timely also because today is the 50th anniversary of one of this country's great naval successes. Fifty years ago, convoy ONS5 was crossing the north Atlantic just out of Cape Farewell. It consisted of 40 elderly vessels escorted by the Royal Navy, and was attacked by a fleet of at least 30 U-boats. At first, things went very badly: 11 of the ships were sunk but only two U-boats. But, on the night of 5 May, the tide turned for the allies.

The British Navy managed to sink a further four U-boats, two U-boats collided and several were badly damaged. The morale of the U-boat fleet was so badly damaged that, three weeks later, Admiral Doenitz withdrew all the U-boats from the north Atlantic and, effectively, the battle of the north Atlantic was won. Therefore, it is extremely fitting that the House should today pay tribute to the men and women who served in the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy and to the reserves for their great heroism during the second world war and on many occasions thereafter.

I also pay tribute to those who currently serve in the Royal Navy for their expertise, which is second to none. The Royal Navy is and will, I trust, always be an example to the rest of the world in showing how naval ships should be operated and how the morale of crews should be maintained. We have a magnificent Royal Navy in every respect, and I was very reassured by the clear determination of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to maintain standards in the future.

However, nothing is perfect and, when the Treasury is cutting the amount of money available to the Ministry of Defence, there can be no doubt that increasing pressure is being put on the Royal Navy, the Army and the Air Force. The Minister of State said that the level of defence was not Treasury-led but was led by the military necessity of the time. With the greatest respect, I do not think that that is the entire truth.

Like all hon. Members, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and his colleagues hold dear the security of this country, and they must be worried about the pressure being put on the Army, Navy and Air Force in the present climate.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon rightly acknowledged that there had to be a peace dividend —rightly, that is, when there is peace. But at the moment there is neither peace nor any sign of peace. In my view, any sign of a peace dividend—or at least, of a peace dividend that we could justifiably take—lies in the distant future. This must not be the time that we look for further cuts in our defence resource.

I hope that Treasury Ministers as well as the Defence Ministers here today will take note of the fact that the House is determined to ensure that the standards of the Royal Navy and of our other services are maintained, and that whatever resources are necessary for the security and safety of the people of this country are given to the Ministry of Defence. The Select Committee on Defence, on behalf of the House, is dedicated to ensuring that that happens.

I shall therefore examine one or two areas that give us cause for concern. The first is the size of the submarine fleet, which has been briefly touched upon already. There is a danger, which has emerged in evidence given to the Select Committee, that the SSKs will not come into service, and those already in service will be sold.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said, no decision has been taken. He implored us not to leap to conclusions, but I am going to take a deep breath, and I am afraid that I am leaping to a conclusion: while no decision has yet been made, that decision is likely to be made. If that happens, we shall be left with a submarine fleet of only 12 boats. In my view —a view shared, I believe, by my colleagues on the Defence Select Committee—such a fleet would be wholly inadequate to ensure the future security of our merchant fleet and the safety of the sea lanes on which this country depends.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Would the hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, care to draw a parallel with something that he said earlier? He told the House how in the second world war the Germans, who were not seen as a major naval power, put 30 U-boats into one operation, and still lost. If the Government go ahead and sell the Upholder class, we shall have only 12 submarines to cover a whole series of potential theatres of operation. Would the hon. Gentleman care to elaborate on the fact that 30 U-boats lost an engagement, whereas the entire Royal Navy fleet will consist of only 12 submarines if this stupid sale goes ahead?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In fairness to the Government, I must add that these days submarines are infinitely more expensive and complex than they were in the 1940s. It would therefore be unrealistic for us to expect the fleet to consist of as many submarines as both the German and the British fleets had then.

However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that, as technology advances, there is a tendency to use fewer and fewer platforms, and to rely upon the increasing ability of those platforms to deliver a hard punch. But however strong the armament of one platform may be, it still takes only one missile to sink one platform.

There is a balance, and the Government must bear that in mind. If we were ever to find ourselves in a major conflict again—it would take a foolish Government to forget all the lessons of history and to put that prospect aside—it would be essential to have enough platforms to secure us against whatever attack might be launched upon us.

Mr. Wolfson: My hon. Friend makes an eloquent case for submarines, drawing—as it is important to do—on the lessons of history. Does he agree that the proliferation of submarines in third-world countries is a potential threat for which we need to be ready?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with him. I am especially concerned about the Iranian Government's purchase of a Russian submarine; we understand that it is the first of several that the Iranians plan to buy. The Iranian Government are fundamentalist, and pose an undoubted threat to the civilised world. We must watch with substantial alarm the spread of that fundamentalism through the middle east and the strengthening of the military position of the current Iranian regime. That should give the House ample warning of the dangers that lie ahead if we allow our own defences to be let down.

As for the surface fleet, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement rightly said that the Select Committee had been quite vexed by the definition "about 40". We have discussed that definition at some length, and we are indeed quite vexed by it. I do not understand why a number cannot be adopted when we define the strength of our fleet, as we do when defining the strength and number of the regiments and battalions in the Army, or the number of aeroplanes in the Royal Air Force. Numbers of ships are not that different from numbers of tanks or aeroplanes; why does the Ministry always have to talk in terms of "about 40"?

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces says, and as the Select Committee has been told, "about 40" does not mean about 40 at all; it means between 35 and 45. Even that definition is somewhat economical with the facts. There is no question whatever of our being able to produce 45 frigates and destroyers. In four or five years' time we shall be extremely lucky if we have 35. I would lay a substantial bet with any hon. Member that, unless there is a great change of policy in the Ministry of Defence, we shall certainly not have 40.

Evidence was given to the Select Committee yesterday that we have 40 vessels at the moment, but that number is far from secure. We were also told that the type 21 frigates are all scheduled to be sold within the next two years or so. Again, the "two years or so" was a fairly vague time scale, which we were unable to pin down more accurately. Apparently, we shall have built only the next two of the type 23 frigates within the next two years or so.

Therefore, all else being equal, I do not see how we could have more than 36 frigates and destroyers available to the Royal Navy by the end of 1995. That is right at the bottom of the scale of figures that could conceivably be said to be acceptable for a surface fleet of that type, to match what will then be the requirements of the Royal Navy.

That is much worse than it sounds, because at least half a dozen—"about" half a dozen, to coin a phrase—of those ships will be put into what is known as a state of "extended readiness". That is a glorious misnomer. Under that terminology, Ethelred should be rechristened Ethelred the Extended Readiness. There is nothing remotely ready about the ships described as being in a state of extended readiness. I cannot say precisely how long it would take to bring those ships into commission, but I believe that the war would be over long before they went back to sea.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: With regard to assessing potential threats, does my hon. Friend accept that warning times are now much longer than they were in the past? In those much extended warning times, it might well be possible to prepare the ships for war.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: That is a fair point. In the past, when major wars have been in the offing, we have had extended warning times. We can fairly say that it was only the foolish who did not realise by mid-1938 that we should have to fight the Germans. The same could be said of the Napoleonic wars; it was clear by the early 1790s that there would be an extended sea war against France.

However, our present problem involves more than the necessity to have enough frigates and destroyers for wartime. The problem is that, if we add to the number of ships in a state of extended readiness the number of ships in refit or otherwise out of commission for one reason or another, the fleet would be reduced not to about 30 ships, as an Opposition Member said earlier, but to more like 15 ships that could put to sea at any given moment.

Given our peacetime, and peacekeeping, commitments even at the moment, I do not believe that we have enough frigates to fulfil our obligations. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has already described to the House the many duties that the Royal Navy is called upon to perform. The Royal Navy is responsible for the Armilla patrol. It is in the Adriatic and in STANAVFORMED. We have a guard ship in the West Indies. We should be able to do more—and I will return to this later—to combat piracy in the eastern oceans. That threat to world shipping is becoming increasingly dangerous.

To be candid with the House, I do not believe that 15 frigates are sufficient for us to be able to carry out a proper "emergency tour plot", to use an Army term, and to ensure that we can meet all those commitments over the next five or six years.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is making an extremely important point. Many hon. Members will recall that the Royal Navy had to put to sea on active operations during the Falklands war at very short notice. Admiral Sir Henry Leach and others believe that, if the full provisions of Cmnd. 8288 had already been put into effect, the Royal Navy could not have sent the task force to sea to recover

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the islands. We must also recognise that there will be a grave shortage of trained reserves, who are just as important as available hulls.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If such a requirement was placed on the Royal Navy again, I believe that it would not be able to meet it without taking ships from other important tasks. I am afraid that we will find ourselves in a position—which I admit we are not in at the moment—of having a Navy that is in danger of being overstretched as our armed forces and soldiers have been overstretched over the past year or two.

Those were the two main areas of the Select Committee's report that I wanted to draw to the attention of the House today. However, I have four comparatively minor detailed points that I should like to put to my right hon. Friend the Minister and to the House for consideration.

First, it is extremely important that the fishery protection task is retained by the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy has minesweepers which are not fully deployed in peacetime. They are ideally suited for fishery protection. It would be a tragedy if the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food decided not to continue to use the Royal Navy to protect our fishing vessels.

I see no reason why British fishermen fishing in British waters should find themselves and their livelihoods threatened by fishermen from other parts of our European Community and not be entitled to the full protection of the Government through the medium of the Royal Navy. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will acknowledge that the MOD is conscious of that and will do everything it can to persuade our colleagues in MAFF to continue to fund the operation to protect our fishermen.

Secondly, I should be grateful if Ministers could ensure that plans for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary are properly developed and carried through. It appears to the Select Committee on Defence that, whenever we look at the figures, we find that we have one tanker fewer than when we last looked. The auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels which, I believe, were scheduled to have been with us by now are not. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Minister can tell us when another AOR is due to be ordered.

Thirdly, we must consider hydrography. I believe that the hydrographic ship which is about to be commissioned is to be contracted out. It is extremely important that hydrographic skills are still available within the Royal Navy and that the charting, which is so important for the defences of our country and for all those who use the seas around us, is properly continued in future so that the skills we now have are not allowed to wither away.

Finally, and on a similar topic, Manadon, the Royal Navy engineering college, is believed to be under threat —[Hon. Members: "It is."] My hon. Friends are reassuring me that it is under threat. I do not know, and I do not profess to be an expert on these matters, whether Manadon can properly be amalgamated with another Royal Navy college, and whether the education necessary can be provided in a different way. However, I must emphasise the importance of the engineering qualifications and skills and the continuation of the course currently conducted at Manadon.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will safeguard the role and expertise of Royal Navy engineering officers in respect of any plans he might have for Manadon. It is a matter of grave concern to current engineering officers and to those who have been engineering officers that the skills which they were able to obtain may not be available in the same way to their successors.

I want to return now to my point about piracy. I am very concerned about the amount of piracy in far eastern waters. The Royal Navy could have a role to play in helping to combat that piracy. I should be grateful if my colleagues could spare a ship to assist any policing efforts in that area. The seas around Hong Kong are dangerous. Substantial threats have been made against the lives of amateur sailors when they have ventured out of the immediate area around Hong Kong.

Far too many instances of the hijacking of ships and the murdering of crews have been reported in the past two years, and those incidents are increasing. It might be worth considering arming merchantmen, as we did during the war, as a possible way to see off the pirates and safeguard the security of trade and individuals in the area.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister of State quote my five-times great uncle at the beginning of the debate. I remind the House that Lord Nelson also said, "It is extraordinary how, whenever we fight the French we win, but during the peace, we always lose." The lesson that we must learn from that and from history is that, whenever there is a period of peace, we run down our defences too much.

It is not my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench who concern me. I am more concerned about my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the pressures that are placed on our defence budget. I ask Ministers to be sure that, if we have to spend more money on our Army and if we have to increase our military budget because of the events in Bosnia, we do not counter that additional expenditure by finding that money from the rest of the defence budget and thus threaten parts of the Navy or the Royal Air Force.

I hope that Ministers will go to the Treasury with, I trust, the full backing of the House and tell my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Despite the current economic difficulties and climate, we cannot cut our defences. We must have what we need, and we want you to give us enough money to make absolutely sure that we can provide the defences that this country currently needs."

6.47 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I cannot claim such a distinguished ancestor as the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). However, I believe that Lord Nelson was most successful when he displayed a robust indifference to the requirements of the Admiralty, which I suppose is the theoretical antecedent of the Ministry of Defence. If the Royal Navy and those who lead it are as robust in their protection of its interests as Lord Nelson, perhaps we can be satisfied that the Royal Navy is in good hands.

As the Minister of State made clear at least by implication when he opened the debate, a single service debate of this kind has little meaning unless it is conducted against a background of the changing security environment. As interventions from both sides of the House have

made clear, there is a belief in the House that a debate of this kind lacks the meaning that it might have if it were conducted against a background of some idea of the overall defence strategy of the Government. In that regard, because we have not had a debate on a White Paper on the subject since 1991—before the last general election—and as it is not clear when we will debate the White Paper for 1993, many hon. Members feel that the debate might have been better informed had those other debates taken place.

We cannot consider the Royal Navy without having some regard to its current and future tasks and responsibilities. Some of them remain unchanged. The primary task of the defence of the United Kingdom—an island nation—is an unchanged responsibility of the Royal Navy. Other tasks that have previously occupied a substantial part of the debate on the Royal Navy—for example, the forward maritime strategy, the protection of supply across the Atlantic and NATO purposes—have become less acute against the background of the changing security environment. The responsibility for the nuclear deterrent, which rests with the Royal Navy, has become less onerous as the threat of nuclear confrontation has receded.

Those responsibilities have been replaced by others—notably, the contribution that we are expected to make to the activities conducted in the name of the United Nations. Our presence in the Adriatic, to which reference has already been made, seems to be a forerunner of similar tasks and responsibilities that we shall be asked to undertake. Those tasks and responsibilities involve different skills. It will be only right and proper that those whom we ask to fulfil those responsibilities have the opportunity to acquire the skills and maintain them at a high level by suitable and sufficient training.

Sir Richard Vincent did us a great service last week when he said that any military action can be contemplated only when there are clear political objectives. That is as true in relation to the possibility of military intervention in the Balkans as it is to the proper conduct and management of a service such as the Royal Navy. Until one is clear about the political objectives that the United Kingdom wishes to bring about, the allocation of the military means and, of course, the resources by which those military means are to be provided cannot be as well informed or as effective as it should be.

There is by no means satisfaction in the House that the Government have laid down sufficiently clearly the political objectives that they regard as being appropriate for the Royal Navy, nor the means by which such objectives may be achieved. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement said tantalisingly, "If we wait until the publication of the White Paper, all the mysteries will be revealed". He was prodded to some extent about his authorship of a recent work on President Nixon. That conjured up the vision of the Minister sitting in a well-known bookshop in Charing Cross road autographing copies of the defence White Paper for 1993 and, by his table, a queue of expectant Members anxious to have not only the document but their personally autographed copies of it.

What is worth extracting from the exchanges between the Minister and hon. Members on both sides of the House is that there is a feeling—it is almost certainly justified by the Minister's reference to the detail that we will find in the White Paper when it is published—that this debate may be less significant than it might have been or, indeed, should have been if the 1993 White Paper had been in our hands.

I shall say a few words about the issue of nuclear deterrence, which has featured to some extent in the debate. Since nuclear weapons are weapons of such awesome potential, and since the Royal Navy has that responsibility, no debate about the Royal Navy should pass without some consideration being given to the issue of nuclear weapons. It appears to be generally accepted by all hon. Members that a four-boat submarine fleet is necessary. The electoral significance of four boats as against three has largely disappeared. Indeed, the argument for four is as true today as it was before the general election—that if a boat is disabled for any reason, it is difficult to maintain one boat permanently on station. Essentially, the fourth submarine provides insurance against unforeseen emergencies.

I firmly believe that nuclear deterrence must be constant if it is to be effective. There is no scope for part-time deterrence. I consider that a distinction must be drawn between the constant availability of a deterrent and the level of deterrence. As has been said, the Government's position still appears to be that up to 512 warheads may be deployed on the four boats.

Let us ask ourselves about the distinction between Trident and Polaris. The range of Polaris is 4,600 kilometres; the range of Trident is 9,700 kilometres—nearly double. Trident is more accurate than Polaris. Trident warheads are independently targetable; Polaris warheads are not. To put the matter generally, if the Government intend to deploy up to 512 warheads on four boats, that represents a massive increase in fire power. Liberal Democrat Members have consistently argued that there should be no more warheads on the Trident system than there are on the Polaris system, which it is to replace. If that were accepted in terms, there would still be a threefold increase in targeting capabilities.

I have always regarded the nuclear deterrent as being a form of insurance. Surely the level of insurance is variable according to the risk. It is worth remembering that the figure of 512 was conceived at the height of the cold war. It is worth considering that, if we were to press the Minister on the question whether we had an effective nuclear deterrent today, he would tell us that the Polaris system is an effective nuclear deterrent, albeit with 192 warheads. Since Trident represents such an enhancement in targeting capability, we are entitled to ask why it is necessary to have more warheads on Trident than Polaris and, indeed, why there should be more than 192 warheads.

Mr. Bill Walker: In the hon. and learned Gentleman's calculations, has he taken into account the fact that the insurance policy is for more than 20 years and that no one can say who will be in charge of the Kremlin five or 10 years from now? No one can say who will be in charge of the nuclear capability which was formerly possessed by the Soviet Union. Against that background, it is wise and prudent to ensure that one has a policy extension and cover for all likely eventualities when one is buying Trident today.

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that, in a time of changed security atmosphere, it might be necessary to acquire more D5 Trident missiles—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that they will not

[Mr. Campbell]

be available. I do not think that he understands that the only reason why we will be able to run them through is that we will be taking them to the United States to be maintained. Since the United States proposes to have an 18-boat fleet of Trident D5 missiles, it is reasonable to assume that we will be able to get more if necessary.

There is a more fundamental answer to the hon. Gentleman's question which he may have left out of his calculation—that is, that the nuclear doctrine of NATO is one of minimum deterrence. We have moved from mutually assured destruction, we have gone past flexible response, and we have gone past weapons of last resort to weapons of minimum deterrence. How is minimum deterrence defined? It is defined as the capacity to inflict upon one's adversary an unacceptable level of damage. If 192 warheads on the existing Polaris system are adequate to do that, the enhanced capability of 192 warheads on the Trident system seems more than adequate to inflict damage on any adversary which that adversary would be unable to accept.

The other factor which the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) has left out is that, on the occasion of Mr. Yeltsin's visit to London, the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), appeared on the nine o'clock news and said in answer to a question that there might well be circumstances in which one required fewer warheads than there were on the existing Polaris system. In those circumstances, we would have rather more persuasive power in the cause of non-proliferation if we as a military nuclear power did not increase our nuclear capacity far beyond what present circumstances dictate to be necessary.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. and learned Gentleman questioned the level of warheads. Has he taken it into account the fact that today there are increasingly sophisticated anti-ballistic missile systems and 20 years from now they will be even more sophisticated? Does not that warrant our having a sufficient level of warheads to make our deterrent credible?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Lady refers to the Moscow criterion. When Mr. Yeltsin came to London, people like me argued in the debate which surrounded that visit that we did not need to deploy more warheads on Trident than there were on the Polaris system that Trident was to replace. Conservative Members argued even while Mr. Yeltsin was in No. 10 Downing street that it was necessary for the protection of the people of the United Kingdom that we should retain a capacity which had the ability to obliterate Moscow. That is simply not a credible position.

It is not necessary to obliterate Moscow in order to inflict damage on Russia at a level which the Government of that country would regard as inappropriae to accept. We must have some element of transparency. Under the START 1 and START 2 treaties which were signed by the Soviet Union and the United States, those countries have to tell each other how many missiles and how many warheads they have. In addition, they have to allow people to inspect their facilities.

If the two greatest nuclear powers in the world are able to reach agreement on two occasions in two far-reaching treaties in such a transparent way, why cannot we be similarly transparent about our nuclear capability? We should be transparent not least because it would give us persuasive power in dealing with the issue of non-proliferation. Many people feel that proliferation of nuclear weapons presents a far greater threat to the stability of the western world and the interests of the people of the United Kingdom than any other current military or political issue.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the life of Trident is estimated to be about 30 years. Can he guarantee that during that period the only effective anti-ballistic defences will be around Moscow?

Mr. Campbell: No, I cannot, because I cannot look into the future. But I am certainly willing to make assumptions based on existing political judgments. The logic of what the Minister says is that if the United States gives to Russia an enhanced anti-ballistic missile system, the people of the United Kingdom will have to acquire a nuclear capacity greater than the 512 warheads which will be on Trident. I cannot look into the future, but I find that proposition, and the notion that any Government would seek authority from the House for it, so ridiculous that it is not worth serious consideration.

Dr. Reid: The hon. and learned Gentleman will appreciate that simply to say that circumstances may change in 20 years and we have the capacity to have more than 192 missiles on Trident is no argument for not restricting ourselves to 192 missiles in the new context of today. Is it not a circular argument for the Government apparently to support the Americans in improving the anti-ballistic missile systems of the former Soviet Union, and of Russia in particular, but at the same time to argue that because those systems have improved the number of warheads on our deterrent must be increased?

Mr. Campbell: The objective of anti-ballistic missile systems is to bring a sense of security. It is a curious sense of security to say, "We will give you this capability but at the same time we shall acquire an enhanced capability so that we can beat the very defensive measure that we have given to you for your protection." Some effort at clear thinking is required on such issues, as it is required on the issue of the defence review.

Our old friend the defence review has appeared yet again in the debate. I am amused that the adjective "fundamental" is always attached to a defence review, as if any review should not be fundamental, but the words have become inextricably linked with each other. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is not with us. One should have some rigour in one's approach to the defence review.

It is wrong to imagine that a defence review will be what one might call a soft option for change. If the purpose of calling for a review is to procrastinate on difficult decisions or to provide a cloak over policy differences, one lays oneself open to the charge of intellectual dishonesty. The defence review can be no substitute for difficult decisions. Indeed, if one carries it out properly, it will throw up a greater series of difficult decisions than the conduct of affairs of this nature on an ad hoc basis.

Therefore, those who advocate a defence review must have the intellectual rigour and political courage to carry through the decisions that the defence review reveals. I

continue to believe that Britain needs a fundamental—if I may fall into the trap of the cliché—defence review which is properly conceived and implemented.

We have moved from "about 50" to "about 40" frigates and destroyers. The hon. Member for Upminster is the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence and he presides over our proceedings with genial firmness. As he said, when we took evidence yesterday it was made abundantly clear to the Committee that "about 40" certainly could not be thought in practical terms to mean 45. The expression "about 40" is meaningless. It is an ambiguous expression. Of course, it is deliberately so.

If the Government said that the figure was a minimum—let us say a fixed minimum of 35 or 36—the Government and civil servants would be open to much more serious criticism if that minimum figure was not maintained. "About 40" allows the Government the flexibility and leeway which means that any criticism of numbers can essentially be deflected. It is a kind of anti-ballistic missile system for officials and Ministers.

As the hon. Member for Upminster said, "about 40" looks to be 35 in reality for the foreseeable future. But, as he said, at any one time the figure could be much lower than that due to refitting or serious maintenance, not least as a result of the introduction of the rather curious and novel concept of what is now to be called "extended readiness". Logic would suggest that a reduction in numbers was justified by a reduction in tasks. I find little evidence of that in current Ministry of Defence thinking.

It seems to me that today's discussion raises a number of important questions. Having concentrated on a role in the east Atlantic, what has now come to be described as the grey water role, are we expressly and deliberately moving away from that? Is force projection now a more dominant factor in the thinking of the Ministry of Defence with regard to the Navy than anti-submarine warfare?

As we are considering the development of an anti-air warfare frigate, does that not suggest the use of such a frigate for the protection of Royal Navy task forces which suggests something more of a blue water role than the roles we have recently fulfilled? One might put the question more starkly: is the Royal Navy moving back from a grey water role to a blue water one, and is that part of the thinking behind the decision to proceed with the LPH? If it is, what will be the consequences for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, because clearly a blue water role and the use of the LPH and Royal Navy task forces raise important issues of support which will also have to be dealt with? Those questions require answers in order better to inform the debate about the future of the Royal Navy.

Submarines are just as crucial and the hon. Member for Upminster dealt with them at some length. In 1990, we had about 29. Under "Options for Change", we were to have about 16. Now the Government are contemplating a reduction to about 12, and that reduction will necessarily contemplate the elimination of SSKs from the fleet. If that is even being considered, it can only be because those who have put it on the agenda as a measure to be considered believe that it has some validity. If it were of no merit or significance, it would not even be put on the agenda and, if it is on the agenda, it can only be because it is believed to have some substance. What is the basis of it being on the agenda? Is it a capability that we no longer require, or is it a question of expense?

It is customary on these occasions for hon. Members to pay tribute to the men and women of the Royal Navy, and several hon. Members have done so already. I do so because it is well deserved, but there is another tribute that we could pay to those brave men and women. We could pay them the tribute of establishing in a clear and comprehensive agenda the tasks which we need them to perform and the resources that we are prepared to allocate to them for the fulfilment of those responsibilities.

7.12 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): In the two years since the last Royal Navy debate, we have seen the terrible events of Yugoslavia and added to the Royal Navy's challenges the need to send significant numbers of ships to the Adriatic. The Royal Navy responded to that new challenge by showing its capability, mobility, flexibility and endurance.

I was talking recently to the captain of the Ark Royal, who has just been relieved, and he was telling me about the high state of morale of the crew throughout their time at sea and the excellence of his team. The endurance of the Navy in difficult circumstances is something of which we can all be truly proud.

History has always shown that the control of the seas is essential, and Britain is well aware of that. It is fitting that we should be having this debate in the same month as the official anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic.

The House will not be surprised if I refer to the case for amphibiosity. Recently, the much-needed decision has been taken to go ahead with the order for the LPH. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that it is time that we decided on a name for it. We keep talking about the LPH, but it means little to those who are not well informed on naval matters. It is time that we brought out a name for it, such as the next Hermes or Albion. A ship of such importance deserves to be given a name very soon.

The LPH—the landing platform helicopter—is a major warship of 20,000 tonnes, the largest ship to be ordered for many years, and it was commissioned only after the most intense examination. I offer my thanks to colleagues on all sides of the House for the support they gave during that long-standing argument. I should like in particular to pay tribute to the wisdom of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my hon. Friend the Minister, who showed the vision to realise the importance of that ship in the future requirements of the Royal Navy.

Amphibiosity has been proved in recent times. In the Falklands, we could not possibly have retaken the islands without that capability. In the Gulf war, United States amphibious shipping did not use it in that role, but it played an important part in distracting Iraqi defences and tied down some six divisions which otherwise would have been available for operations in the desert.

Amphibious vessels have a special capability; they can hover, poised for as long as necessary across the coast, and land on potentially hostile coasts at a time and place to suit military and political considerations. One can certainly envisage circumstances in which it would be necessary to evacuate offshore in a crisis.

Ships of that nature have great potential for use in a whole range of lower-intensity scenarios: disaster relief, humanitarian aid, civilian evacuation and military support to coastal states. The Americans illustrated that recently in Somalia.

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

Nothing has happened over recent years to diminish the importance of amphibious capability. Recent events in the Adriatic with the Ark Royal and the Argus pressed into use served to reinforce the need for it.

Up-to-date transportation for the Royal Marines is paramount. I am delighted that the orders for landing platform docks to replace the Fearless and the Intrepid are still going ahead. I was particularly pleased to hear in the Select Committee this week that there are to be two more major ships following the LPH. The landing ships are to be rebuilt and modernised for future life. There is no doubt that amphibiosity requires proper command and control, proper facilities for docking and a specialist force. One cannot make an ad hoc force into an amphibious force; it just does not work. It requires ships and crews that are constantly practised in the skilful operation of disembarking in amphibious operations.

I am delighted that the Royal Marines have a sure future; they are almost alone in the services in having strength that is not subject to any major review and providing Britain with a specialist role on the world scene.

I believe that the order for the LPH is a sign of Britain's determination to continue to play its part on the world's defence scene. The cost of the amphibious capability is small compared with the much larger cost of Britain's contribution to the allied rapid reaction which I personally welcome as I believe that it is in the interests of Britain and NATO. It is important that we have decided to retain and enhance our amphibious capability.

The House knows how important the elements of the amphibious package are to Swan Hunter and to Tyneside. I have made it clear on many occasions how important those orders are to the last of the United Kingdom's big shipbuilders at Swan Hunter. The Ark Royal, now in the Adriatic, was herself built at Swan Hunter. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister say that the award of the contract will be made on the basis of technology and value for money, and I am quite confident that the excellent team on Tyneside will win that order.

It is interesting to reflect on the commitments of the frigate and destroyer forces. Some six ships are now permanently away in the south Atlantic, on the Armilla patrol in the Gulf, in the West Indies and on other permanent commitments. If we allow for the time for passage to distant parts, the back-up before they sail and leave for the crews when they return, we are talking about something like 12 ships permanently tied up in those six posts. If, on top of that, we allow for refits, for training, and for trials for the very long periods that are now needed to work up very complex new ships, we have a significant number of vessels tied to permanent duties.

In the case of the Adriatic, the Navy was able to respond, and that it could do so successfully proves our existing capability, but I have concern about the sustainability of an operation of that nature. For instance, Ark Royal will be coming back in the summer to this country. If the situation in the Adriatic continues as it is now, presumably Invincible will have to go out there to replace her. When Invincible's period of service is at an end, Ark Royal will have to return with her crew. To sustain a long operation in that area will demand many resources from the Royal Navy.

Looking to the future, it is the sustainability of a task force for any length of time, on top of the commitments that we already have, that concerns me.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not my hon. Friend making an important argument for the necessity of retaining three CVSs? Were we to go down to two, as envisaged in Cmnd 8288, John Nott's review which had to be set aside because of the Falklands, it would be very difficult to keep one carrier on station. Furthermore, would there not be another potential difficulty, in that we have only two operational air groups? If we want to give adequate time for training and for leave, there may well be need to revert to three.

Mr. Trotter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his observations both about the ships and about the aircraft on them. Illustrious is coming back into service from refit next year, and it is fortunate that she is doing so; otherwise, the existing two would have to take six months about. In other words, their whole time would be tied up in that task.

The Navy is a technological service, and its capability depends on the number and age of its ships. Reference has already been made to crew size, and it is significant that the new ships have crews 30 to 40 per cent. smaller than those that they replace. That should be borne in mind when we are considering the total number of people in the Navy.

A balance must be kept in deciding how funds will be spent on ships and on men, and there are considerable advantages in having new ships, not just because they are much more capable but because they need fewer crew—a big cost saving—can be expected to be easier and cheaper to maintain and, one would hope, will take less time in refit. All those are strong arguments for building new ships.

The second balance to be maintained is between the vessels in the fleet and their cost and the support structure and the cost of the bases ashore. This question must be faced. I refer particularly to refits. One understands very well the historical reasons for existing over-capacity in the royal dockyards, but if there were true competition between those dockyards and the rest of the shipbuilding and repair industry in the United Kingdom, I am sure that we would get better value for money. The result of unnecessarily high spending in the dockyards must be less money available for operating ships or for buying new ones—in short, a smaller Navy than we could get for the same amount of money.

That money unnecessarily spent in the dockyards means less strength and capability for the Navy. I strongly urge my hon. Friend to look carefully at the possibility of more work going out to capable yards like those on the Tyne and in other parts of the country. Recent figures show that only 14 per cent. of the money spent on refits at present has gone out to competition.

There was an interesting experiment in 1985, when a submarine went to a yard on the Humber for a refit and a Leander class frigate was refitted on the Tyne. Both exercises were regarded as successful, and it was hoped that they would be preliminary to further, similar refits in the future going out to competition. That has not happened, and I hope that the matter will be reconsidered, because I believe that the Navy would benefit significantly from doing so.

I too end by paying tribute to the men and women of the fleet. We started with the quotation of Nelson's tremendous signal at Trafalgar. These days, one must refer to England expecting every man and every woman to do their duty. I was delighted to hear from the captain of the Ark Royal of the successful inclusion of women in his crew. There are 100 women now at sea on board Ark Royal, fitting successfully into the team.

The example of the Navy's response to the challenge of crisis in the Adriatic has shown how well it responds to the task we give it. Its men and women respond with great skill and professionalism. The country has never had a better team at sea on the ships of the Royal Navy, and we can justly be proud of them.

7.24 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Two Opposition Members have already referred to the fact that we have had no defence White Paper debate. I believe that it is the first time since 1970 that a defence White Paper has not been debated in the calendar year of its publication. We may even be in the bizarre position of having a debate on the 1992 White Paper after the publication of the much trailed 1993 White Paper. There should be more regular debate, and there should be taking part in all these debates, either introducing or winding up, a Treasury Minister. Let us be honest: the Treasury determines defence policy.

In my extensive study of the North American Indian, I found a character, a Sioux, with the delightful name of White Men Run Him. I suspect that that principle of naming ought to be referred to our Defence Ministers. So let us be honest and bring into this debate those who call the shots.

The Treasury would like to cut defence expenditure, and it has done. It is not very good at running the economy, and history shows that it is not very good at determining defence policy either. I would have thought that the Ministry of Defence should not leap on the fact that the Treasury has given it orders to cut defence expenditure, to cut commitments, to cut our forces and to cut the number of platforms that we possess. It is rather naughtily trying to provide a sophisticated justification for what it is doing, but it is sounding a little hollow these days.

The cold war is over, but when we look at history we see repeated cycles of conflict and peace. The Minister has said that he cannot look into the future, and no more can the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). I should have thought that the world was sufficiently unstable and had quite enough hot spots. *Jane's Defence Weekly* identified 72 hot spots round the world. An unclassified Sandhurst briefing a couple of weeks ago announced 35 situations of conflict, or potential conflict, in the former Soviet Union alone. Then its author acknowledged that there had been a small error in subsuming under north Caucasus and south Caucasus two crises, whereas there are probably as many crises within the Caucasus as there are in the rest of the former Soviet Union.

When we talk about proliferation, about conflicts over scarce resources or about the growth of fundamentalism, we must remember that Boutros-Ghali has said that by the end of the century there could well be 400 states in membership of the United Nations, many of which will have been created as a result of physical violence, war and civil war. So when the Government defence team tells me that there is no longer a threat in the north Atlantic so we no longer need the Upholder class submarine, I would point to the threats elsewhere.

For example, the Mediterranean seems to be the new arc of crisis. Some think that there should be a new major NATO commander based on Naples rather than having a commander, allied forces, southern Europe as a subordinate of SACEUR, such is the growing importance of the Mediterranean, including the sea itself, the littoral states, the middle east, the Gulf, the Black sea, the Balkans and the Maghreb. There are problems of terrorism and of proliferation and again a conflict over resources. All this demands reconsideration. Surely "Options for Change" was misconceived at the time and is rather more misconceived now.

I believe that we are in a rather difficult period. I hope that the Russian military will no longer be a threat to anyone, including the Russian population; but we can never be certain. I hope that it will never again become a military threat, but it could. I was in the Royal United Services Institute library recently and came across the following marvellous quotation:

> "The Russian army is experiencing a period of considerable financial retrenchment. Reasoning from past experience this fit of economy is unlikely to prove to be permanent."

It comes from the RUSI journal of 1882. So we have been here before, and we should be cautious about the future.

That is not to say that we can maintain armed forces at their levels of the height of the cold war, but let us not delude ourselves that we are moving into a tranquil era in international relations: we are not. I hope that the Government recognise that.

Peering into the future, we need only look at the deteriorating crisis in the Balkans. We have a number of options. One is to pull out: there are people who argue that we should call a plague on all their houses—they are all liars and crooks, so let us get out and leave them to it. Others argue, more or less, for the status quo. Then there are the military options—limited air strikes or punitive air strikes, safe havens and protected areas. Another option is to raise the stakes and begin a full military intervention. Another is to rely more on the embargo. These are all bad options, and we are moving inexorably closer to one or more of them.

The alternative—to do nothing—is likely to be even more catastrophic. Those of us with an interest in history remember the arguments of the 1930s—that if we shut our eyes perhaps the crisis will go away. It certainly did not and will not.

There is so much flammable material in the Balkans that it is reaching the point of natural combustion. My research assistant has identified 13 separate routes into a general Balkans war, and we have not finished our research yet. Just doing nothing and hoping that the problem will go away will not make it do so—there would be a Balkans war involving at least two NATO powers. That would be the price of indecision, so inaction is not really a viable alternative.

Mr. Wolfson: The hon. Gentleman has told us about the instability of the world and the creation of smaller nations. Does he agree that the sort of war with which we may have to deal and the kind of peacekeeping that we may be called upon to perform will require, in addition to

[Mr. Wolfson]

the Trident deterrent, strong and flexible conventional forces of all sorts? That is why many of us are anxious that such forces be maintained for Britain.

Mr. George: Absolutely. Flexibility is the key. We will have little flexibility if we have fewer platforms, for instance. I fear that one of the reasons why the British Government are being rather less than robust is that they realise that their flexibility is diminishing, to such an extent that their only option is to do little. That is not the correct way to proceed.

I remember how Mrs. Thatcher went to see George Bush in the early stages of the Gulf conflict, apparently to offer some backbone. Now, Warren Christopher is searching Europe in vain for some of that backbone among his European allies. Ultimately, perhaps, a bit of backbone will be found, to the advantage of all concerned.

Given the Bosnian Serb rejection at this stage of the Vance-Owen agreement, we must do a number of things. We must not take any military action until a referendum has been held. We know that it is a time-wasting device, but we must wait. In the meantime, there is much that we must do. First, we must tighten the economic screw. There is clear evidence that sanctions—they have been seriously applied for only a couple of months—are hurting. The work force in the former Yugoslavia, or Serbia, numbers about 400,000. Those workers are not very efficiently deployed, but on their shoulders they must carry all the unemployed, those who are technically employed but have no work to do, the elderly and the disabled. They must also carry the enormous weight of the Serbian military and the non-productive economy of the Bosnian Serbs. Their diminishing numbers cannot indefinitely carry all these burdens.

Sanctions must be even more rigorously applied, therefore. Monitors, EC or UN, must be placed on the border between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to find out whether Milosevic's enthusiasm for settlement is genuine. We need to know whether we will apply sanctions or at least not send in troops, materials and food to his erstwhile allies. This might save him from future embarrassment.

There must be continuous planning either for Vance-Owen implementation or for some form of military intervention——

Mr. Wilkinson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are we not straying rather far from the coast?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Hon. Members are permitted to speak fairly generally in debates of this nature, but the hon. Gentleman is certainly straying rather far. This debate is on the Navy, not Bosnia.

Mr. George: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kindness; I shall listen carefully to his speech. Even he must be aware of the fact that WEU naval forces are operating in the Atlantic, that STANAVFORMED—standing naval force—is operating in the Mediterranean and that naval forces are operating out of Split—a number of colleagues have been to see them. If there is to be a NATO force, it is likely to be under the control of the allied commander in Naples. I do not believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are a defence specialist——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know the difference between a debate on the Navy and a debate on Bosnia.

Mr. George: I am obliged to accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do so under a degree of protest. A naval war is quite likely as well.

A number of criteria must be observed by our naval, air and armed forces if the crisis deteriorates. These forces must be authorised by the United Nations. Secondly they must be NATO-led, and a naval commander will probably be involved. We must decide which forces are to be deployed, too. I fear that it will be difficut to put in as many as 75,000 troops—although the Americans are apparently committed, the Russians have said that they will chip in and the French are quite keen. So far, however, we have not heard a figure from our Government.

The problems to be resolved include the scope of the operation, the rules of engagement and the United Nations mandate. This last is important for establishing the relationship between NATO and other participating NATO countries. We must decide who pays and what the military tasks to be performed are. When the forces are to be deployed is also a major decision.

I come now to more specifically NATO matters, which the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) will find much more to his liking. The Royal Navy, as the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee has said, stands at "about 40" ships. We all know that it is actually 38 and falling to 35, which in turn is dangerously close to "about 30". We are talking about naval matters. I did not want to bring partisan, political points into the debate, but I must remind the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood about 1978, the last full year of the supposedly discredited Labour Government. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement referred critically to Denis Healey and his defence cutting. The cutting which Denis Healey did when at Defence or the Treasury still managed to leave a fleet of frigates and destroyers of about 66, which seems to me to be "about 70", whereas we are moving to "about 30".

I shall have more to say about naval matters. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood for gently prodding me in that direction. When it comes to submarines, that discredited Labour Government in 1964-70 and in 1974-79 had 27 submarines plus four Polaris submarines. We are getting down to 16, plus Polaris/Trident. If the Government proceed with the sale of the century and provide Indonesia or whoever with a submarine fleet, we will be down to 12 compared with 27.

Some hon. Members may mutter that the Navy was older and decrepit in those days. I can assure them that it was not. In defence, one gets what one pays for. In 1974-79, in a period of detente because the cold war began only after the Conservative Government came into office —it was not their responsibility—defence expenditure averaged 4·9 per cent. of GDP. The Government are driving it down to 4 per cent. There is no way in which we can have defence forces to meet the many contingencies that arise if we are operating on 4 per cent. of GDP.

The threat has gone, we are told. Hardly; the threat is there but it is taking a different form. We must consider the evolving threat from countries which are acquiring navies and buying submarines from anyone who will sell them. Iran is a case in point. To hunt one Iranian submarine would require quite a lot of our submarines.

Recently I watched a television programme in which high technology was deployed to find 40 sunken American

and Japanese warships around Guadalcanal. It failed to find them all. If high technology had difficulty in finding 40 frigates and destroyers around one island, our 12 hunter-killer submarines will have an enormous task in finding our potential adversaries. So the Government have got their "Options for Change" policy wrong and the time has come to reverse it.

In peace time the tasks and commitments are increasing while the resources available are decreasing substantially. To keep two ships in the Armilla patrol requires six to eight ships. To keep one off the Falklands and one on West Indian guard requires, I believe, three or four ships. If we are to have so many ships in extended readiness, the number available might be 25 rather than 35. I hope that we are not getting out of the naval business.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence has referred to the future of the Royal Navy engineering college at Manadon. I cannot see how naval engineering can be merged with other elements of service engineering. I suspect that there are common elements, but much is so distinct that if one deployed naval engineers, army engineers and air force engineers in the same institution, that would cause a considerable problem. Has the Ministry thought of that?

If the Ministry is intent on closing Manadon, there is a fine university in Plymouth which may cast its eye upon the wonderful site where Manadon is located. I have no authority to say this, but might the university of Plymouth, with a fine tradition of marine engineering, subsume, upon the campus which it could acquire with its resources, some of the functions and responsibilities of Manadon? I hope that thought has been given to that.

I could say far more if time were available, but I hope that the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood is pleased that he dragged me into this direction. We are living in dangerous times. Within a month, whether we like it or not, we could find ourselves in a conflict. No one can predict what the future holds. The history of military intelligence is one of continuous failure. Earlier in this debate it was said that perhaps everyone knew what would happen before the second world war. They did not. Mr. Chamberlain did not know until months or weeks before the war started. The Falklands war took everyone by surprise, as did the Gulf war. So for it to be said at the Dispatch Box that the warning times are much longer is flying in the face of reason and history.

A country fights the next war with the men and material which it has. Our first inquiry of the Select Committee on Defence was about ammunition storage in west Germany. We would have fought a war with the ammunition they had within 50 yards of them. The prospects of getting ammunition out of the ammunition storage sites was remote, let alone reconstituting the military. It is not possible to build a Harrier in a month, as happened with a Spitfire. Therefore, to assume that all is sweetness and light and that we are entering upon a period of world harmony is dangerous nonsense.

I should not like to be a Minister responsible for perpetrating the myth that we are in a period of peace. Sooner rather than later our armed forces will be engaged in a conflict. They need to be well equipped and well trained. I fear that the British may not be able to participate in future conflicts if the national interest is threatened because of the cuts which have been announced and the "Options for Change" plans which may be implemented. That I oppose.

7.46 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). He showed great courage in carrying a lonely beacon for common sense during the lean and loony years of Labour party defence policy in the '80s. I respected thoroughly the way he did that.

I welcome the debate. Most of the issues which need to be aired, affecting the Royal Navy, those who serve in it and those who serve it, closely concern the people of Portsmouth as much now as for centuries past. We have had quite a few quotations. I will contribute another. For the people of Portsmouth and for me, the words of Charles II are as relevant now as when he uttered them:

> "It is upon the Navy under the good providence of God that the safety, honour, and welfare of this realm do chiefly depend."

When he said that, Porstsmouth dockyard was already 200 years old. Its task now is as recognisible as it was then: in time of peace and war to be a first-class home base for ships and to provide reliable services, including repair and maintenance.

The fleet maintenance and repair organisation has suffered the loss of refit work, and some redundancies are resulting. That is a painful process, particularly for the individuals concerned and their families. However, a work force of almost 2,000 will continue to provide the best service available to the Royal Navy. What they need more than anything else is a period of stability. They also need to be managed imaginatively to be able to accept work in the dockyard, whether commissioned by the public sector or the private sector. The facilities of the dockyard need to be used to the maximum not only because to let them stand idle would be foolish, but because of the employment provided in an area suffering more than most from the recession and from cuts in orders of defence equipment and the highly competitive international market.

The Minister of Defence should continue to provide the best opportunities and help to British-based business when they are in competition with overseas firms for Ministry of Defence contracts paid for from British taxpayers' money. Due consideration should be given to the maintenance of the skills that we need to retain because who knows when they might prove vital. I would rather see skilled jobs in Portsmouth than in Cherbourg, in Havant, Waterlooville, Fareham and Gosport than in the equivalent places throughout the world.

When I hear Labour and Liberal party spokesmen—there is no Liberal Democrat representative in the Chamber—criticising the Government for defence cuts and their employment implications, I think of their policies and the greater cuts proposed at their party conferences. Reference has been made to Labour's policies, but I should like to draw attention to the 1990 policy document of the Liberal Democrats. It was called "Reshaping Europe" and proposed cutting our defence expenditure by half. However much the Liberal Democrat spokesman may wriggle and play at being the tough guy, that document has never been changed or cancelled by any subsequent conference. The influential party activists would not have it, but still the Liberal Democrats engage in criticism of the Government's defence policy.

I should now like to deal with naval personnel and surface ships. I wholly agree with those who say that men, ships and commitments must match. The Army's regimental system makes it difficult to reduce manpower

[Mr. David Martin]

but, as has been shown recently, it is much easier in the Navy. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the recent further reductions, or downsizings, as they have been described, which will reduce the total to 50,000 by the end of this decade, are a direct result of the recent reprieve of some regiments.

Mr. Rifkind: Perhaps my hon. Friend might like to reflect on that. I assure him that the figure of 50,000 is an internal working estimate of what may happen. It has as much to do with better use of existing manpower, the fact that a new frigate will require fewer sailors than an older vessel and that some jobs will be civilianised as with implications of resources. My hon. Friend must not assume that the reduction is a policy decision or the result of a manpower requirement. It is an internal assumption, and the best that we can make at the moment about the future needs of the Royal Navy. It has no status other than that and I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend.

Mr. Martin: I welcome that intervention and hope that it will help the morale of those serving in the Royal Navy, especially those in my constituency.

I am pleased that it is planned to keep the strength of the Royal Marines at 7,000 with equipment to match. I was also pleased at the news about the helicopter ship. The Royal Marines and the Royal Navy are models for the model forces that are required in today's world. The hon. Member for Walsall, South spoke about that. Operational flexibility, rapid movement, a high degree of mobility, an amphibious capability and the quick and effective projection of air and sea power are all on offer for a combination of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. The Royal Marines played a vital role in northern Iraq, and the Royal Navy is playing a similar role in the Adriatic, backing our humanitarian effort in the former Yugoslavia. Her Majesty's ships Ark Royal, Cardiff, Broadsword, Argus and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels Olwen and Fort Grange are some of the ships that are currently involved. There is as much need now as there ever was to keep the right number of ships and men available for the tasks that are and will be increasingly required of them in future.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. My constituents understand the need and what is more they rightly insist, as I do, on the necessity to keep our defences as powerful and effective as British interests require. That is principally to protect the security of this country and that of our few dependent territories.

Traditionally, because we have learnt the stern lessons of history, we must have sufficient forces to contribute to world peace, recognising as we always have, and I hope we always will, that other people's wars can all too easily affect our direct interests and become our wars—as happened most recently in the Gulf—hence our involvement in NATO, and our active role in humanitarian peacekeeping missions as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

My constituents do not want us to be tempted to overreach ourselves, to be pushed into playing military parts that are out of proportion to those of our allies in the civilised world. At all times we must carefully define the British vital interest before we commit British lives, the lives of Portsmouth people, to costly attempts to impose peace on inveterately hostile tribes in parts of the world that are experiencing new disorders, let alone a continuation of the old ones.

The evil empire, as the former President Reagan once called it, kept the cork on many bottles containing evil genies. Once more they have been released and their terrible deeds have a harrowing effect on us all, as we learn daily from television, radio and the newspapers. However, we must not let the human and political desire to "do something" override military reality, taking us well beyond a contribution to peacekeeping or the provision of humanitarian aid which we all recognise is necessary.

Preventing conflict where we can is one thing but its quenching by main force is quite another. I have found no significant support in my constituency for adding to the problems that we face in Northern Ireland and elsewhere by undertaking new, long-term commitments unless they are seen as essential in the interests of our security, in protecting vital British interests or in carrying out obligations that we have inherited or in which we plainly have to be involved.

Two matters are of special constituency relevance. The first of them was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, and it is about fishery protection. I agree with what he said. Recent incidents involving France have shown the continuing importance of Royal Navy protection. I do not wish to see that changed because it has widespread support in my constituency. Secondly, I welcome the Royal Marine headquarters at HMS Excellent on Whale island. It continues the long-standing connection which looked as if it might be broken when they left Eastleigh barracks. I am sure that all hon. Members who are present will have visited the Royal Marines museum there. If they have not done so, they should visit it as soon as possible.

I also welcome the sensible relocation of the Second Sea Lord manpower to Portsmouth and combining with the Commander in Chief, Naval Home Command. That cuts the flag ranks to one officer for both functions. We shall continue to welcome such developments for a more efficient Royal Navy, especially if they involve relocation to Portsmouth. In return for my continuing support for Government policies on the Royal Navy I should like a continuation of the Government's support for Portsmouth's role as the premier naval port in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement spoke about Lord Curzon singing Rule Britannia in his bath. To a debate on the Royal Navy the words are as relevant now as they were then. They are:

> "When Britain first at heaven's command
> Arose from out the azure main,
> This was the charter of the land
> And guardian angels sung this strain—
> Rule Britannia, rule the waves,
> Britons never will be slaves."

That song would surely be welcome at bath time at No. 11.

7.59 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Of course, the hardware that underpins that song was built on Tyneside. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) said, on behalf of his constituents in Portsmouth, that he welcomes the Government's decision to proceed with a landing platform helicopter vessel. I do as well. He

made a speech on behalf of his constituents, who have a long and honourable association with the Royal Navy, and it will come as no surprise to anyone who is a regular attender at these debates that I shall say a few words on behalf of the great shipbuilding community of Tyneside.

In opening the debate, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement quoted from Lord Nelson. A more appropriate quotation might have been, "I see no ships." When I first started taking part in debates on the Royal Navy, we spoke about the 50-ship surface fleet. Then we spoke about 50 ships, which we found out meant 45, and now we talk of 40 or about 40 ships. The numbers are declining rapidly. The annual debate has followed the decline in the size and fortunes of the Royal Navy, a decline that I dislike.

A more sensible way for us to arrange the debate might be to have a day each to debate the Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the strategic deterrent. There can be no doubt that the concentration on the strategic deterrent—the Trident programme—has dominated conventional naval defence and overshadowed debates such as this.

I must at once declare a pretty obvious vested interest. My constituents build the hardware for the Royal Navy. They build conventional warships. That is the main business of Swan Hunter shipbuilders in east Newcastle and Wallsend. Over the past 20 years, Swan Hunter has provided about 80 per cent. of the fleet auxiliaries for the Royal Navy. The decision on the landing platform helicopter vessel is crucial to the survival of shipbuilding on Tyneside. If the carrier is not ordered, and ordered on time, Swan Hunter will close and that will be the end of shipbuilding on Tyneside. Thus, the decision is of enormous importance to my constituents.

I welcome the fight that has been put up by Conservative Members for the landing platform helicopter carrier, the decison to procure the vessel, and even more, the decision to bring the decision on procurement forward so that there may be an announcement in the next few weeks. The main shipyard on Tyneside, Swan Hunter, was privatised via a management buy-out. It has no great reserves or resources behind it. The directors have run the company, which has provided good-quality vessels for the Royal Navy, entirely without backing from any major defence contractor. They have provided ships on time, to price and, above all, of outstanding quality—a quality that has been acknowledged by the customer and from the Dispatch Box. I hope that, in the next few weeks, the Minister will say that we will have the opportunity to continue to provide warships on Tyneside, and in particular the helicopter carrier, for the Royal Navy.

The way in which defence procurement, particularly naval procurement, is carried out now means that conditions in the marketplace are different from those that pertained in 1986 when Swan Hunter was privatised. To meet even domestic requirements, it is essential now to have large, established financial backers. It is even more necessary to be able to bond the bids that are put in for work, even defence work, overseas. Whether Swan Hunter will continue as it is or will form an alliance, or more than an alliance, with some other, much larger, defence contractor is a question that will be addressed once the announcement about the landing platform helicopter carrier has been made.

I am certain that there is a strong and secure future for shipbuilding on Tyneside. That future is based on the skills of the work force, on the quality of the product that Tyneside produces for its principal customer, the Royal Navy. If anything underpins the industry on Tyneside, it is the quality of work produced.

I welcome what has been said about the amphibious programme. The landing platform helicopter vessel is the most important single part of that programme, but it logically follows that it should be complemented by the landing platform dock decision and the landing platform ship logistics decision. The announcement that we can expect a further procurement decision later this year on those aspects will be widely welcomed in the industry.

I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will address two other issues at the end of the debate. First, I should like a statement about the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel. AOR1, or HMS De Lorean, as it is known in the industry, was a scandal. AOR2, which is being built on Tyneside, will probably come into service first and certainly will have been built far more happily than AOR1. It is difficult for the Minister to announce further type 23 frigates without saying anything about the auxiliaries to accompany them.

If type 23s are to be grouped around auxiliary oil replenishment vessels, we should be considering an AOR3. An announcement should be made about that, or we should be considering a substitute form of provision—perhaps a merchant vessel substitute. The extra type 23 frigates that are being ordered will have to be replenished in some way. It is incumbent on the Minister to tell us what the Royal Navy's plans are for that and how he intends to proceed on that issue.

The second question concerns not just ships taken up from trade—merchant vessels that are required to assist our fleet in times of conflict—but the crews that are required to accompany them. With the decline in the British merchant fleet has come the decline in the number of British people who are able to serve as seamen. There is even a decline in the number who are able to serve as officers. The Government said in the last Navy debate that the whole issue of ships taken up from trade and of some form of Treasury subsidy to preserve a strategic reserve of seamen and merchant officers would be examined. That has been quietly dropped, but Britain's merchant fleet continues to deteriorate. There are defence implications in that and they should be addressed.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken about the quality and dedication of the people, of both sexes, who serve us in the Royal Navy and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. As I represent a constituency that has a long and proud tradition of serving the Royal Navy and providing its hardware and its crews, I should like to echo what has been said about it.

8.8 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I begin by echoing the last sentiment expressed by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) about the work and bravery of the men and women of the Royal Navy. I shall touch on one aspect which has not been mentioned so far. I refer to the Royal Navy's representational role in different parts of the world. I had first-hand experience of that last October when I attended a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in the Bahamas, which had been ravaged by a hurricane. It just so happened that three of our ships were there at the

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

time, and their crews did tremendous work clearing up after that disastrous storm. They were widely praised by not only the Government and other politicians but the people of the Bahamas. Britain can be proud of the role that our service men and women played on that occasion. I was pleased to meet them aboard HMS Cardiff, and that they included serving members from my native Somerset, who had taken part in that operation.

The point has been made many times in this debate that this is the era of flexible response. We have been told of 25 possible flashpoints around the world and of a further 35 potential future troublespots in the former Soviet Union. Events in the Gulf, Somalia and Bosnia and many other peacekeeping operations serve to emphasise the importance of the flexible response policy spelt out in "Options for Change".

I echo the words of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the sentiments expressed by Sir Richard Vincent—that before embarking on any operation, it is essential to define one's objectives. John Stuart Mill wrote:

"Our diplomacy stands for nothing when we have not a fleet to back it."

I am in accord with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East because I, too, welcome the decision to build the LPH vessel and welcome the words used by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who said that it was firmly in the Government's programme. I am also glad that it seems likely that the tendering process will be completed earlier than expected.

The House might wonder why a Member of Parliament who represents a totally landlocked constituency should want to take part in this debate. In fact, my landlocked constituency is at the heart of the flexible response, in that it includes the Royal Navy air station at Yeovilton, with its 2,800 military and naval personnel and 500 civilians. That station plays an important role. It houses two front-line naval air squadrons, 800 and 801; the Sea Harrier training squadron, 899; two front-line Sea King helicopter squadrons, 845 and 846; and one training squadron, 707. In addition, the station hosts the Royal Marines and their three brigade air squadrons.

All that adds up to efficient use of a major air station, which conducted no fewer than 86,000 air movements last year. If I know a lot about that, it is because my own home used to lie in the station's flight path, so I am well aware of those air movements.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My hon. Friend counted them in and counted them out.

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend is right.

The announcement on 26 February that the specialist offices providing support for helicopters used by the armed forces would be brought together at Yeovilton is widely welcomed by that community and by the station itself, which is playing a crucial part. The men and women there were reassured by that decision, which demonstrates that their futures remain at the top of the agenda of the armed forces and of Ministers.

My links with the armed services do not end there. Many of my constituents work for the Westland group. I pay tribute to the quality and excellence that are pursued by that company. The latest example is its development of the EH101 helicopter. The order placed in September 1991 for 44 EH101 Merlin helicopters at a cost of £1·5 billion was welcomed not just in Somerset but throughout the south-west region, which has suffered many severe shocks and setbacks over the past couple of years. Yeovilton and Westland show that, despite difficulties, the defence industries are central to the region.

Westland also supports 40 Sea King helicopters dedicated to the Royal Navy's amphibious operations. Eventually, those aircraft will need replacing, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will heed my words when I say that we hope that, when the time comes to seek a replacement for the existing helicopter, a utility variant of the EH101 will in due course be on offer. I was pleased to receive a letter dated 7 April from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, which stated:

"I am pleased with the way in which our Merlin programme is shaping up, and I am naturally well aware of the attractions of the EH101 utility variant, which I expect to be a strong contender for meeting our support helicopter requirements."

Perhaps it would be appropriate to have a little commercial for the Fleet Air Arm museum in Yeovilton. That remarkable facility pays its own way and I recommend that anyone who comes to our neck of the woods, particularly if he or she has small children, should visit that museum. It has been considerably revamped over the past two years and offers an excellent and fascinating, and not just historical, afternoon or day. It is always remembered by those who visit it.

It is important to the Royal Navy and to our other services that the Government can respond properly to the considerable demands being placed on them in many parts of the globe. I believe that we are in a position to do so, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recall that the former Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), pointed out in the debate on "Options for Change" that not only was reorganisation of the armed services necessary but it would not be forgotten that equipment quality was vital. I hope that that will be remembered, because with a smaller Army and in a more dangerous world, it is essential that our armed services are given the most modern and up-to-date equipment to undertake the considerable tasks that we demand of them 24 hours a day.

8.18 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I want to raise just three issues, of which I have given notice to the Minister's office. First, does the Ministry of Defence feel that it has any responsibility in tracing the tankers and other ships, particularly the other ships, that clean out their tanks, especially in the North sea but also in the pure, clean seas around Rockall? The beaches not only of my constituency but of the Secretary of State's city of Edinburgh are still absolutely dirty. That is not because of any lack of regulations but because the regulations cannot be enforced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spent part of his life as an Edinburgh councillor and will know exactly the problem of which I speak. It remains a problem and spoils the beaches on the south bank of the Forth. I hope that the Royal Navy has some responsibility to undertake the difficult job of trying to find which ships are being dirty. In our book, no punishment would be too harsh for the

skippers who do that. Part of the answer is that there should be facilities in every port for the prompt cleaning out of tanks.

My second question concerns whaling. We have all had a long letter of 27 April from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which says:

"the 45th meeting of the IWC is to take place in Kyoto, Japan from 10-14 May. I believe that this is likely to be one of the most critical in the Commission's long history."

All my colleagues agree with the Minister's letter, on both the humane killing of whales and the Antarctic whale sanctuary. The Minister said:

"I have already expressed my interest in the French proposal for an Antarctic sanctuary for whales, south of 40 deg. south which was presented to the last IWC meeting."

I support the Ministry in that proposal, but if any of those ideas are introduced, someone, somewhere, somehow will have to enforce them.

A week ago, a remarkable programme showed how Greenpeace was doing its best. I do not go along with everything that Greenpeace argues or stands for, but on this matter it has been extremely active. The truth is, however, that a slow Greenpeace ship is no match for the highly efficient Japanese and Norwegian ships.

I do not normally stand here and attack individuals —still less do I attack Prime Ministers, and still less do I attack socialist Prime Ministers—but I should like to express my sense of shock at what I can only think of as the hypocrisy of Gro Harlem Brundtland. She lectures us all on being green—she says that she is the greenest Prime Minister on the face of the planet—yet, when it comes down to political interests in the Lofoten islands and elsewhere, what does she do but hold out for whaling? I do not know any other word for it but "hypocrisy". That is not only my feeling; I understand that it is the feeling of the members of the Socialist International.

Others wish to speak, so I will confine myself to a third question. I have repeatedly initiated Adjournment and Friday debates on the ecology of the Gulf, and I still do not think that everything has been cleared up that should have been. There are the Benthic problems, the problems of the bottom-dwelling fish and the problems of the various sea grasses which are very important.

I cannot expect the Royal Navy to take care of those problems; nevertheless, we still have a presence there and there is still the problem of clearing up the aftermath of the Gulf war. As the Minister knows, I was passionately against the Gulf war, but this is not the time to go into that. All right, there has been a Gulf war; what is the Royal Navy contributing to the clearing up of the Gulf?

I feel very strongly that, when others wish to speak, those of us who are lucky enough to be called should keep our remarks as short as possible. I will leave it at those three questions.

8.23 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for, as always, speaking briefly and to the point, and—again, as always —raising matters that are not constantly mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that my speech will draw attention to other issues that are not often mentioned in the Chamber.

Let me join many other speakers in paying tribute to the enormous amount of work that my constituents in Portland and Weymouth do for the Navy. As all hon. Members probably know, my constituency must be the worst affected by the "Options for Change" cuts, and the workers concerned are possibly under the greatest threat. Indeed, they already know their future. It is very sad for me to be almost writing their obituary now; but I assure the House that the spirit of Portland, Weymouth and south Dorset is to fight, and to demonstrate what we can do for the Royal Navy and the other armed forces.

It will be a sad time next year when the ships assemble for the 50th anniversary of D-day. Weymouth, and Portland harbour in particular, was used for the armada that was set up for D-day, and was the centre of our efforts to free the rest of Europe from the Nazi tyranny.

I have always been proud to claim that Portland has four major functions; unfortunately, it has already been announced that three of them are to move. I shall not dwell on that for long, because the arguments have been rehearsed many times. I pay tribute to Ministers—including the Prime Minister—for extending every courtesy, and allowing me every facility, to make the points that I have made. I am sorry that I have not yet been able to persuade them of the quality of my argument, but I always like to think that others find it disturbing that the MOD constantly changes its mind. It has made up its mind to remove people from my constituency, but I believe that there is still time for it to decide not to do so.

Mr. Foulkes: We recently received a deputation of trade unionists from the hon. Gentleman's constituency. They argued strongly that the alleged savings from moving the base from Portland would not be as great as the MOD had suggested. They have sent me a very convincing case. Does the hon. Gentleman support that case? Does he feel that those representations may provide an opportunity to return to the MOD and challenge some of its claims about so-called savings?

Mr. Bruce: I pay tribute to those who produced the report that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. Let me also say what a conservative report it is—I am not referring to the political leanings of those involved. It does not over-egg the pudding, or over-emphasise the items that have not been properly costed in the case for closure. A committee is now looking very closely at the proposals for run-down and the move to Devonport, and at every costing.

We had the great advantage of the services of a former royal harbourmaster, who had recently left the Royal Navy. He went through the figures. They were not simply written on the back of an envelope by someone who was not fully aware; that former harbourmaster is probably more aware of the costs than anyone else in Portland, because he has done a full term there. However much the MOD may say, "The admirals have advised us", that certainly does not apply to the admiral who was sitting at the base, and his staff. Although Navy discipline does not allow them to express their views in public, I am convinced that they felt in their heart of hearts that this was the wrong thing to do.

I do not want to labour the point, but the MOD is talking about the possibility of £70 million over 10 years. I think that many people in the MOD thnk that the figure is £70 million a year. In fact, our case demonstrated that the programme would be £2 million more expensive over that 10-year period. I also believe that the Ministry's estimate of the cost of the move to Devonport is very conservative.

[Mr. Bruce]

We are hearing about the run-down in the number of ships that are to be trained. A critical point is that MOD is asking the Navy to move to Devonport and make a 10 per cent. saving in the cost of sea training, when it will actually be training 20 to 25 per cent. fewer vessels. If the boot were on the other foot, and we were asked to demonstrate what we can do at Portland—the Devonport costings, of course, relate to the new tasks that are to be inherited in three years—we should be only too pleased to oblige. That is certainly one of the things that we shall be doing.

Portland is also to lose the sea systems controllerate. That proposal was made soon after I became a Member of Parliament, but it was kicked out. The time scale for moving the sea systems controllerate as a separate entity was 12 to 13 years. The then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who has since moved on to higher things, kicked it out because he believed that it was not cost effective and a silly waste of money.

The new proposal is that the sea systems controllerate should move into land and air systems. A much bigger and better deal has been made by the Ministry of Defence. People will be moved out of London. According to the MOD's figures, it will take 14 years to do that. The MOD, as we know, moves people round every 10 years, so after 10 years it will have to wait for another four years before it gets anything out of it. It is a foolish move.

The defence research agency has been offered £100 million from a stretched defence budget to restructure itself. If it is indeed given that sum of money to obtain new facilities, it has opted to go slightly outside Portland, though still within my constituency, to Winfrith. I know that it will set up a good research centre there, but I very much doubt whether that is a sensible use of MOD resources.

What is to stay in Portland for the time being is HMS Osprey, the Lynx operational air station. It carries out all the front line operational training of Lynx helicopter pilots and it provides first line maintenance. It is a heavily uniformed base, with 2,000 people working in the air station. We are keen that it should not be closed down when the change is made from Lynx to Merlin helicopters. We want Merlin to be used there. We fear that that will not happen. The Royal Navy sensibly decided to build an air station where it could train people and put them on to frigates and destroyers right next to where they do their operational sea training. Having split the two apart, though, I just wonder whether somebody will come up with a wonderful scheme to put this noisy but extremely pleasant air station in the middle of Plymouth. A couple of helicopters will do the early morning moves. I am sure that the people of Plymouth and Devonport will be glad to hear the sound of freedom right over their heads early in the morning.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I wish my hon. Friend every success in his efforts to keep the Portland base open. I believe that it should be kept open. Has he made representations to the MOD that Portland is the only naval base that could effectively be sealed off? Security, in my opinion, is a very important consideration in these increasingly uncertain times when the threat from terrorism is real and with us all the time.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is true that we have a secure area. We shall continue to have it. The cost of keeping the air station secure will be roughly the same as the cost of keeping the whole of the Royal Navy base secure. We found that the full cost of security for the naval and air station was knocked out of the costings for the move to Devonport. We pointed that out to the MOD, but I do not want to go in great detail into that matter.

I hope that the Merlin helicopters will be based at Portland. When it becomes obvious that operational helicopters should be based next to the sea and ships, we may find that more and more ships come back to the revitalised and privatised Portland naval base, which will provide all these services, as well as civilian services, to the rest of the country.

Portland must look for future opportunities and it will continue to fight its case regarding the foolishness of these facilities being moved away from Portland. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. He has been extremely good about meeting people who have much to contribute to the debate. Most of the details are confidential. However, I can assure the House on my right hon. Friend's behalf that it takes only a phone call from me and the MOD deals with these matters from the outset. What I want to do is to gain all these additional jobs for Portland, as well as to retain the ones that are already there. We can demonstrate that we do things a great deal more efficiently.

Portland is to put in place a small ship repair yard. It is important that we should then be allowed to bid for MOD work. Our hourly rates are already lower than those of anybody else on the south coast. We believe that that will remain the case.

As for the cleaning of oil tanks, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, there are no United Kingdom facilities for recycling oil. Proposals will be put to my right hon. Friend regarding the provision of such facilities.

The main point that has been made in the debate is that this is a Treasury-led reduction. We are downsizing the armed forces. I do not know what downsizing is. It probably means that we are going to get 5 ft 8 guardsmen instead of 6 ft 2 guardsmen. If one picks up the estimates and the Red Books and looks at public expenditure, one finds that instead of defence expenditure over the next five years going down by 10, 20 or 25 per cent. it will not go down by a single per cent. It will be flat, at about £23 billion.

Our experience of defence estimates in recent years is that we have always overspent, because of contingencies. Therefore, all sorts of deals have to be done, whether it be with our allies in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, to try to balance the MOD budget. There will be no financial benefit from these difficult decisions.

One would imagine that we would be slashing defence facilities, that we would be selling off buildings left, right and centre, but that is not happening. I was interested to read in one edition of *Focus* about what is happening in practice. It says, "Green light for Innsworth". There will be a new office block there, on a green field site. Then we read that "DHSA forms up" at Yeovilton. That is good news for Yeovilton. However, it will have to go into temporary accommodation for a year or so before it has its

brand-new, ultra-modern office block. And what about the Royal Artillery? A 15-acre site has been designated for a new heritage centre.

I am glad to see that Admiralty Arch has been restored, because one of the things we do well at Portland is to provide Portland stone for such activities. When efforts are being made to save defence procurement money, one wonders why people are building on green field sites—for example, at Northavon. One finds that £300 million is to be spent there before the computer system is paid for, which I understand will cost another £300 million.

I have tried to find out why it is that the MOD is not tightening up. I found—in an obscure document, of course—the cost of the refurbishment of the main MOD building. It is too embarrassing to give the figures on the Floor of the House; hon. Members will have to look them up. However, I can tell the House that not only was the estimate phenomenal but that the actual cost was more than 100 per cent. higher than that horrendous estimate. How can anyone from head office tell people who are building new office blocks that they cannot do so because it will simply be pointed out what the Ministry of Defence is doing with its main buildings? One building at Portland is about to be closed down and everyone is leaving it, but a new telephone exchange is being installed. The building will be open only for another two years but it appears to be cost effective to install a new exchange.

It is clear why we are not achieving the reduction in the defence estimates that we should. I believe passionately that, in this day and age, we should be Treasury led. We should be looking to make savings of a couple of billion pounds over a few years and we should be working to that end. If we were approaching the question from that angle, we would probably make a better job of what we are doing. Time and time again, it becomes plain that cost-saving measures can take up to 10 years to produce the intended saving and that £100 million, £200 million or £500 million have to be spent before savings are made.

If we intend to reduce staffing levels, we should consider whether we need to make anyone redundant. The armed forces are one of the unique operations which people join for a reasonably short period and then leave. If we were to change the recruiting pattern, I am sure that in a few years we could reduce staff to the desired levels without causing great harm to people's careers. Natural wastage is not only more humane but it costs less.

We need to examine fundamentally our arms and weapons systems. If one asks a military expert what a changed threat means, he says first that one must retain everything and, secondly, that one must spend more money because the threat is different. We must bite the bullet, and I well understand the Government's difficulties in keeping intelligent, forceful and persuasive generals and admirals on their side.

The transfer of redundant facilities is extremely important. A current exhibition in London shows all the wonderful facilities that the Ministry of Defence has vacated in the past decade or so but which it has not sold. It is important that we consider all the armed forces, especially the Navy. As a cost-cutting exercise, we could suggest chopping five admirals off the top brass—that might have an electrifying effect and enable us to reduce the defence budget without the Royal Navy losing its teeth.

8.42 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I hope that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) will forgive me if I do not follow the thrust of his argument. While resisting the temptation to do so, I was thinking of the connection between his constituency and mine. We both have a common predecessor—my predecessor bar one in Greenwich was also briefly the hon. Member for South Dorset. It is a reminder, on this of all days, that even seats that are felt naturally to belong to one particular party do not always do so at by-elections.

I am especially pleased to participate in the debate, as I represent a constituency that has a very long and proud history of naval and maritime connections. In the past, the great bend of the River Thames by Greenwich and Deptford was the site of bustling naval dockyards. That era is long gone but, although ships are no longer built there or moored at Greenwich, the area still preserves its naval connections as the home of the Royal Naval college.

During the past year, I have had the privilege and good fortune to visit the college several times as a guest and as an occasional visiting lecturer. I was greatly impressed on every occasion by the professionalism, high calibre and commitment of the commander and staff, and I pay tribute to Commander Searle and his colleagues for their absolutely first-class work.

The Royal Naval college is a centre of excellence for the training of not only British naval personnel but staff from other services and from many navies overseas. The college is keen to develop that aspect of its work and to attract more students from a wide range of backgrounds from Britain and overseas. It is an institution of which all hon. Members can feel justifiably proud, and I hope that the Government will do all in their power to support and promote the college and encourage it to attract an ever wider range of students from all over the world.

Sadly, one clear impression that I have gained from my visits to the college and from other contacts with the Navy in the past year is the damage done by the uncertainty which surrounds the future of the Navy and which has already been highlighted in the debate. Since the publication of "Options for Change", the Navy has been in a period of uncertainty, not a period of uncertainty in which it could feel that things might get worse or better but one in which the number of ships and personnel have gradually been reduced in a one-way process.

When "Options for Change" was published, we were talking of approximately 66,000 men and women in the Royal Navy. The figure was expected to be reduced to 60,000, then to 55,000 and, just before Easter, the estimate was reduced to 50,000. Similarly, we have heard the rather sad story of the uncertainty about the numbers of surface ships, where again the trend is clearly downwards.

People whose whole life and career have been devoted to the Navy have put it to me forcefully that a reduction in itself is not entirely unacceptable. They are realists, and they know that Britain's role in the world is changing. They know that we no longer have the ability to maintain the size of the Navy that we had 50 years ago. They also know that international relations have changed in the past 50 years, and they accept that Britain will have a smaller Navy.

However, what they find especially debilitating is the continuing uncertainty of not knowing when the reduction will stop, not knowing what the shape and size of the Navy

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

is to be and not knowing whether they will have a job in the future or whether a redundancy notice will come their way. The uncertainty and the inability to plan ahead with confidence is the most damaging aspect. Hon. Members of all parties have recognised that the atmosphere of uncertainty is the worst possible position in which we should put the men and women on whose dedication, professionalism and commitment we depend to maintain the high calibre and quality of service provided by the Royal Navy.

Although I accept that the Government cannot end the uncertainty tonight, I add my voice to all those who have urged the Government to ensure that the promised White Paper is published at the earliest opportunity—certainly well before the summer recess—that it sets out a clear framework for the future and ends the ambiguity and uncertainty. At the very least, publication should save Ministers the embarrassment of having to continue to prevaricate or trying, unconvincingly, to deny that decisions, which appear to be inevitable, have already been taken.

Before the debate, I reread the record of our previous debate on the Navy which took place about two years ago. I was interested to note that the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement who opened the debate, the hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle), was waxing enthusiastic about the Upholder class submarine and went on record as saying that he was confident that the SSK would be a valuable asset for the Royal Navy in future. Sadly, we are now all beginning to fear that the SSK will prove a valuable asset to the Treasury, not to the Navy.

I should not like to conclude without saying a brief word about equipment. A few weeks ago, I had the good fortune to join HMS Argyll, one of the new type 23 frigates, on a voyage up the Thames to the Pool of London. That gave me a welcome opportunity to see one of the Navy's most modern warships, and I am grateful to the captain and crew for all their hospitality and their kindness and consideration in showing me round the ship.

However, I could not fail to notice the absence of one key piece of equipment. Even the eye of an untutored layman such as myself could not help noticing that the hangar was extraordinarily generous for the size of the Lynx helicopter that sat in it. Clearly, it was designed with a view to accommodating not the Lynx but the EH101. We must ask when those ships can expect to receive the greatly advanced capacity of the Merlin helicopters for which they were designed. I hope that the Minister can cast further light on that subject. I was pleased to hear confirmation that the order for the helicopters was progressing well, and I hope that we can be given some idea of the date on which the EH101 will come into operation.

The one clear message to come from today's debate is the need to bring to an end the uncertainty that has for so long hung unhelpfully over the future of the Royal Navy. The Opposition believe that that would be best achieved by a thorough defence review that would clarify the role of the Navy and the future size and shape of the service. We fear that the Government will not opt for that degree of review; nevertheless, we hope that the White Paper, when it is published, will help to bring an end to the damaging uncertainty that is making it so hard for the men and women in the Navy, to whom we have all paid tribute this evening, to do the job that they want to do, the job that we all depend on them to do.

8.51 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): As a former naval officer and holder of the Reserve decoration, I have a great interest to declare in the Royal Navy and in the Reserve, for both of which I have a great affection. Generally speaking, I find that that affection is, understandably, shared by millions of our constituents. I entirely endorse all the compliments that have been paid by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to the Royal Navy and its personnel.

As a Member of the House, I have another interest to declare—an interest in the defence of this realm. Any Government, regardless of party, who ignore that imperative stand accused of dereliction of duty. For centuries, the Royal Navy has been the one sure sheild in the defence of this realm. The history of our nation is a history of men that go down to the sea in ships, a maritime history in which Britain's trade, influence, diplomacy and, ultimately, its defence against aggression have been sustained by a strong Navy. For centuries, the Royal Navy has been a symbol of Britain's self-assurance, a manifestation of its power and influence, and a statement of its political will.

What is that political will today? Is it right that we should give a higher priority to, for example, welfare, on which we spend one third of our national budget, than to defence, on which we spend only one tenth of our national budget? I do not agree with that order of priorities, but that is the background against which we hold the debate. The debate also takes place in the context of a Navy that has shrunk and is continuing to shrink; given the current political will, it will continue to shrink. Scaling down an operation is much more difficult than expanding one, and we are left with more admirals than ships, more dockyards than work and more than enough uncertainty.

In those circumstances, what should my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers do? First, I suggest that they examine the way in which ships are designed and built. Will they consider carefully whether it makes sense to continue with what could be called the committee approach to designing ships? Although I am pleased that we are to co-operate with our allies in future construction, I fear that such co-operation may lead to interminable delays, constant wrangling about what should go into the ships, and, at the end of the day —this fear has been expressed by other hon. Members—a cost that the nation cannot afford.

I also ask Ministers to examine the specifications we establish for our ships. We simply cannot account for every eventuality or cover every threat. As other hon. Members have said, we cannot go for gold-plated solutions. In the very month in which we celebrate victory in the battle of the Atlantic, I remind the House that it was with very basic hulls, driven by the simplest of machinery —the triple reciprocating steam engine—that we defeated the U-boat menace.

I do not see it as in any way inconsistent with Government policy to close down our in-house design facilities and to hand over to British industry the opportunity to design and build ships for the Royal Navy. Some of my colleagues may agree with me that our

priorities would be more sensibly ordered if we closed down various departments at Bath rather than the Royal Navy engineering college at Manadon. There are precedents, and at least one British shipyard is successful in designing and building warships, especially for export. I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends in government that the very survival of British shipyards and shipbuilding may depend on our taking that route and putting out to commercial design and build the future construction of royal naval warships.

I invite my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to ask himself what will be left of a Navy that has thrown away the invaluable skills and experience that we have accumulated in anti-submarine warfare, as will happen when we dispose of the silent-running conventional submarines. They are the only type of submarine that can operate on the continental shelf, and that, of course, is where these islands sit. When my right hon. Friend considers whether we should retain the Upholder class of submarine, will he bear in mind the fact that, as has been said by other hon. Members, we cannot cover a commitment by retaining only one ship of a class? We need to retain at least three, and ideally four.

I ask my right hon. Friend to consider what will be left of a Navy that has discarded many aspects of a hydrographic service that enjoys a worldwide reputation and generates income. The replacement of the ships involved, which is apparently a compelling need, should not present a problem. We have already solved the problem involving HMS Endurance, the vessel that operates in the south Atlantic, by means of a bare-boat charter. It has not been necessary for us to design and build our own ships, and it is perfectly feasible to solve the problem in that way.

What is going to happen to a Navy which has abandoned its traditional fishery protection role in respect of which the presence of the white ensign is significantly different from that of the red or blue ensigns? If we abandon seagoing Royal Navy personnel in the hydrographic service and in the fishery protection role, will we not throw away most valuable opportunities to give young officers experience of command and other training opportunities not just for officers, but also for ratings?

I want my right hon. Friend the Minister to ask himself what will happen to a Navy which has reduced the number of frigates and destroyers to a level at which it is impossible to match the nation's demands for ships as instruments of foreign policy or for ships in time of conflict. I remind the House that the reality of the post-world war two history of defence is that we prepared for wars which did not happen and we have fought wars that we did not expect. In his opening speech, my hon. Friend the Minister drew attention to the new and imponderable problems that lie ahead.

When my right hon. Friend replies to the debate, I hope that he will give us some idea about the future of the Royal Naval Reserve. I am sure that I speak for many hon. Members when I say that a pronouncement on that aspect of naval matters is long overdue. Does a Royal Navy with a manpower of 50,000 personnel and a reserve of indeterminate number and undefined role—a very small regular service and even smaller reserve—reflect the priorities of the electorate who sent us here or match the aspirations of my right hon. Friend's colleagues in Cabinet for Britain to play a leading role in the councils of the world?

9 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I will restrict my remarks to the question of Trident. It has been said already that we have not debated the defence estimates yet. I suspect that one of the reasons for that is that the figures are not particularly genuine and that all sorts of deceptions and slush funds are involved. Nowhere is that more true than in respect of Trident.

I am sure that hon. Members have received, as I have, a briefing for this debate from the British American Security Information Council—or BASIC—which casts doubt on the cost of buying Trident missiles from the United States. The briefing states that the MOD's figures for the purchase of these missiles simply do not measure up. Even at the lowest unit price that the United States set in the history of the programme, the figure that the MOD gave to the Select Committee on Defence comes nowhere near that figure.

The briefing states that, in the financial year 1994, the estimated cost to the United States is about $49 million per missile. However, according to a memorandum from the MOD submitted to the Select Committee on Defence, the cost would be about $24 million per missile. That is half the actual unit cost.

If that is not the true cost, the Minister has some explaining to do. If that is not the truth, he should explain why the House and the country have been deceived. If that is the true cost, and it is half the cost stated in the United States programme, there is an old northern saying of which all hon. Members are aware: "You don't get owt for nowt."

The Minister must explain what the deal was. It has been said that Trident is truly independent as far as Britain is concerned. There must be doubts about that if the missiles are being obtained on the cheap—although on the expensive cheap of course in this context. The United States might be able to call the tune and, whenever the United States says, Trident might have to enter the disarmament negotiations and be cut. That would mean that millions of pounds of taxpayers' money would have been poured down the drain and wasted.

As has been said, the Royal Navy faces an uncertain future. It faces conventional cuts because of the Government's obsession with a nuclear role. The Royal Navy is wrongly shaped. The concentration and costs have related to the nuclear element. They are tied up with an anti-submarine warfare role in line with the United States maritime strategy so that we would rush into the North sea at their behest, and into the front line, in any conflict.

That nuclear aspect is out of date. The Royal Navy now needs a peacekeeping and sanctions enforcing role. As a result of the nuclear obsession, the Royal Navy is not resourced or equipped for that role. Trident is unsuitable. It is a post cold-war relic and doomsday weapon that is totally unsuitable in the modern world.

The Minister has been asked this question many times: what is the purpose of Trident? Who is it aimed at? In what scenario would it be used—because it is a massive weapon? Each warhead has the minimum of Hiroshima—200 kilotons. It has a massive use which is morally indefensible. Even in a sub-strategic role, whether it has only one war head on it, that would be equivalent to one Hiroshima, or perhaps even more. It simply cannot be used in the battlefield context. Trident is obsolete and

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stops us from getting on with the other role that is essential for the Royal Navy—the conventional or the peacekeeping and sanctions enforcement role to which I referred.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to the proliferation implications, which are extremely serious. They include the increases in nuclear weapons by a nuclear weapons state. Under its original design, Polaris was to have 16 missiles with three warheads—that is 48 warheads per boat. If there are four boats, that is 192 warheads—192 Hiroshimas. Where is the justification for that?

Lady Olga Maitland *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: Time is short and I want to let other hon. Members speak, if possible.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute year book referred to Britain having only 96 Hiroshima warheads. However, with Trident we will have 128 warheads per boat—we will have 512 Hiroshima warheads on five boats. The paper produced by the House of Commons Library refers to the yield of those weapons being greater than that. The number of warheads has increased from 96 to 512.

The figure of 512 is an appalling proliferation, and it is unjustifiable. The Government will be told at non-proliferation treaty conferences that that is the case. The figures will be used by non-nuclear weapon states as an excuse for them to go nuclear. Instead of the Government using the political way to disarmament, they will simply be left with supporting military action in the future. That is a dangerous thought.

I shall refer to global protection against limited strikes because it is a new factor in the Trident debate. GPALS is the post-cold war version of the strategic defence initiatives—star wars. The United States is discussing such a limited defensive shield with Russia and, indeed, other countries. That is likely to involve the installation of early warning facilities at Fylingdales. It is an absurdity to have GPALS, in which the British are involved, yet the United Kingdom's nuclear weapon Trident will have to penetrate the combined United States-Russian defence, which partly relies on British information. It is nonsense. Even if we proceed with GPALS, which seems to be the approach, Trident does not fit in: it does not make sense.

I shall deal with the safety implications of Trident because they are serious. It is likely that Polaris will continue for many years to come. As hon. Members know, there are problems with the Trident programme—the first one will not come on stream until late 1994 at the earliest, and probably later than that. Therefore, Polaris is likely to continue for more than 10 years. Sir Ronald Oxburgh, the Government's chief scientific adviser, said that that could have serious safety implications for the submarine programme.

There is no disposal plan for nuclear submarines, yet the Government continue to commission new ones. There are transportation problems with nuclear weapons and the nuclear submarine cores. The Ministry of Defence was refused a licence for its flasks by the Ministry of Transport in 1991, although it had plenty of time in which to redesign them. However, it did not do so, which is a sign of its negligence. There are enormous problems of transportation. There are also problems of storage. There is a lack of space in the dockyards and elsewhere to keep the used nuclear reactive cores. Yet the Government ignore all those problems.

Trident lacks important safety features. It uses volatile propellant and the warheads are placed around the third stage rocket motor. The latest safety equipment in the United States, such as insensitive high explosives, the enhanced nuclear detonation safety system and fire resistant pits, is not included in the United Kingdom's Trident system. That leads to anxiety about safety.

BASIC said in its briefing:

> "A fire in the missile compartment of a submarine could result in the detonation of several nuclear warheads—at less than maximum yield—and include the reactor core, producing serious radioactive dispersal."

The Minister should answer that comment because that dispersal would be as great or perhaps greater than that from Chernobyl.

Trident is bad strategically. It is bad for the Royal Navy, bad for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, bad for Britain and bad for the world, and it should be scrapped.

9.11 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): So late in the debate I can only throw away such notes as I had prepared and speak from the heart, and speak briefly at that. I declare three interests. First, I am a parliamentary adviser to Thorn EMI, which provides defence equipment to the Royal Navy. Secondly, I have the privilege, with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson), of being on the parliamentary armed forces scheme with the Marines. That is a remarkable privilege. It is a fine scheme. I pay tribute to our former colleague, Sir Neil Thorne, who instituted it.

Thirdly, without wishing to be tediously repetitious, I must point out that week after week at business questions I have asked for a Navy day debate and a two-day debate on the defence estimates. Without, I hope, being churlish—because I am pleased that we are having this Navy day debate—I observe that, in parliamentary terms, today is the closest one can get to a dies non, in as much as a key by-election and county council elections are being held today so that attendance in the House is thinner than it normally would be. This is perhaps symptomatic in a parliamentary sense of the current importance attached to defence and naval matters. I can only express my regret that it is so. However, I should not be too unhappy because, with a thinner House, I am allowed as an erstwhile crab to be called on fish heads day.

Mr. Wolfson: On my hon. Friend's point that it is symptomatic of the priority given to defence that the Navy day debate has been held today, does he agree that it is increasingly important to bring back to the top of our agenda the defence of the country and spending on defence?

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is right on that, as he is on so many matters. He speaks trenchantly and with great authority. I am sure that he is right. I add my warning to the warning that he uttered: if the party to which he and I and our hon. Friends belong does not revert more clearly to its traditional attachment to the importance of national defence, we shall lose much of the trust that should rightfully be ours of those who care for the security of our country.

We are a naval nation by tradition. We are island people. Unless we have a balanced fleet, we cannot hope to secure our commercial and strategic interests, nor can we be worthy allies. In the sense of retaining a balanced fleet, let me make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that we are in danger of something happening for the first time in our history—of being No. 2 in naval terms in Europe. The Government may have noticed that one of the first decisions taken by the newly appointed French Defence Minister, Mr. Léotard, was to call a halt to the cuts in defence spending and announce the go-ahead for a second nuclear carrier. That will mean that the French navy will have two proper CVSs with no fewer than 90 Rafale Ms embarked upon them, whereas we will have only three air groups, one being a training air group, which has a maximum of 36 Sea Harriers. That disparity is not acceptable to the British people.

We expect our nation to be at the forefront of naval matters in Europe. Our training is second to none and the quality of our vessels is very high, but I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench take to heart the wise observations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), who knows more about the naval construction industry than anyone in the House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who is a former naval person and who spoke more authoritatively than I could. I endorse everything that they said.

9.15 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): I welcome the clear statement that the LPH order will be placed in the near future. I am glad that the importance of amphibiosity has been recognised and I am happy to hear that technical and financial factors will be taken into account to determine where that order is placed. I hope that any decision that is taken can withstand subsequent scrutiny by either the National Audit Office or the Defence Select Committee, or, indeed, both. No doubt the Government have taken into account the recent critical reports on procurement of oiler ships in particular. I support the bid of VSEL and Kvaerner Govan and have no doubt that it will be successful in a fair and free competition.

I turn to the general issue of the Navy. We are being told that we have the fourth largest navy in the world, but we have to consider seriously whether we can afford that when we have an economy in the second division, fast heading towards relegation. We need a review not only on the desirability of many of our objectives but on their affordability; that is missing. There is a danger that we will end up identifying tasks which we believe to be desirable but which cannot be afforded without overstretching the limited resources we are prepared to make available.

Earlier, there was an interesting little dance around the issue of whether defence matters were determined by policy or by financial criteria. It essentially missed the point. They have to be taken together; there has to be iterative process to determine what we are prepared to spend on defence and in what direction. That is why the Labour party is right to call for a thorough defence review.

I want to touch briefly on one or two points relating to Trident submarines, although a great deal has been covered by my hon. Friends. I should like to draw attention to the fact that it is easy to achieve an underspend on the estimates if one overestimates in the first place. That is not sufficient cause for satisfaction.

The Minister spoke well about extended readiness as a means by which a vessel could be kept in readiness to be brought into service when needed, but at minimum cost. Perhaps he will be prepared to consider applying something similar to the Trident submarine force, or at least part of it. Is it absolutely necessary to have complete commissioning of all four boats? Will it not be possible to make some saving as a result of partial commissioning of at least one of them? If it is an insurance policy, is it necessary to have them all completely activated from the beginning? I hope that the Minister will genuinely examine that suggestion as that approach would ensure that money could be freed up and, if possible, spent elsewhere.

I also wish to echo earlier remarks about avoiding proliferation. This is an enormous issue on which we in this country have the opportunity to give a lead. If we decide to be anything other than clear that we are not expanding the number of nuclear weapons, we give the wrong message to the rest of the world.

The Government are keen on market testing. I hope that they will show some restraint, particularly on fishery protection and related matters. The prospect of the French or the Icelandic navy winning a fishery protection contract for British vessels is entirely inappropriate. Allowing Group 4 access to quick-firing cannon might be a solution to the present difficulties in the prison service, but it would not be entirely appropriate for fishery protection.

We should take account of the points made earlier about piracy. Although there is an important role for the Navy, it must be seen in the context of the Government's policy towards the British shipping and shipbuilding industries. It would be inappropriate for us to provide naval ships to protect vessels which have been built, crewed and flagged abroad and which turn to this country simply for military protection. We must have a coherent and holistic vision of our maritime strategy.

I support the concept of an early defence review and hope that it will be supported by the Minister.

9.21 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the few minutes that are left before the Front-Bench speakers reply to the debate.

The tone of this debate on the Navy is very different from the tone of debates held in the early years after the Conservative victory in 1979. I remind the House and, in particular, Treasury colleagues—because many of my remarks are directed to them rather than to the Ministers now responsible for defence—that at that time the fact that we went through a recession with difficult spending problems did not prevent us from giving a high priority to defence spending, which was expanded in those years.

I voted for "Options for Change" under pressure, under duress, but I was assured by the then Secretary of State that "Options for Change" would be continuously reviewed in the light of developments. At the time, we all expected a real peace dividend. The Gulf war was unexpected, as was the conflict in the Balkans. Northern Ireland is no better than it was then and terrorist threats and action on the mainland are worse now. I suggest that

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the basis on which "Options for Change" was put forward has altered and that those spending intentions need reconsideration.

My plea, therefore, is that we put defence spending higher up on our agenda, that we make it the first priority for this party in government and that we realise that any failure to maintain our defence capability does no service to our country or to our allies.

Specifically on the Navy, concern about the lack of clarity in our strategy is another aspect that has come out in the debate. That needs to be resolved. If the Government do not want a full defence review—I can understand the argument for that; it is a sort of catch-all that may not produce the right results—we expect to have in the White Paper a clear definition of the Navy's requirements and how we are to meet them. We expect, for naval personnel as well as for the House and the country at large, a clear picture of where the Government expect the Navy to be, together with precise clarification of the numbers of personnel and ships.

There has been a change. Some years ago, we had what was described as a blue water Navy that covered the world. Then the strategy narrowed, becoming more concerned with European defence within the NATO area. Now it has expanded again and the Navy has resumed a world role even though it is now much smaller. There is a serious danger of overstretch—I include surface vessels and submarines in that. I am not hung up about specific numbers. Manpower, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said today, is needed less for modern ships, but I am anxious that those who serve in the Navy should have a secure future and should know clearly what their career opportunities are.

Mr. Bill Walker: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to the fact that I have been here throughout the debate—I make no complaint about that—and I wanted to speak about Rosyth, an important Scottish matter——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. So far, the hon. Gentleman has not delivered a point of order for me, and he knows it. If he has one for me, I will listen to it.

Mr. Walker: Is it in order for me to apply, because of the circumstances, for an Adjournment debate on this specific and narrow matter, and particularly on nuclear safety?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is for the hon. Gentleman to decide.

9.26 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): As the local election polls have now closed, I want to go on record as being the first to offer my condolences to the Government for their awful performance tonight.

It is a pity that the timing of these debates sometimes means that we do not have many speakers, but that is usually compensated for by the fact that the quality of contributions is far higher than that in some other debates because of the expertise that hon. Members bring to bear on them.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) mentioned one of the recurrent themes of the debate: the lack of clarity in the Government's intentions in respect of the Royal Navy's objectives and roles.

The Liberal spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), pointed out that it has been two years since our last general debate of this nature, so we have been somewhat lacking in opportunities to discuss the subject. As several speakers have said, next year's White Paper will be presented to us before we have debated last year's—and that has not happened for 20 years. He also spoke of the need for clear political objectives.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who brings a great deal of experience to these matters, made it plain that he, like us, does not believe it when the Government say that the cuts in the Navy and elsewhere are not Treasury-led. When a Conservative Member who chairs a body as august as the Defence Select Committee agrees about this, surely Ministers should pay attention.

The hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) agreed with most hon. Members that the Government appear to lack a strategy. The Select Committee has pointed that out, too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made several important points. As most sensible people have been saying for the past couple of years, he supports the case for a defence review; and he expressed the feeling held by all Opposition Members that the Government have been less than candid about nuclear issues.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) stressed, as did several others, the importance of an amphibious capability.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), with his usual ingenuity, managed to give us an analysis of the position in Bosnia but related it to the importance of the Royal Navy in the performance of its task not only in the Adriatic but much wider. With some success, he contrasted the record of the Labour Government with the pitiful record of this Government on naval as well as other matters.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) called for a period of stability for our dockyards, a point to which I will return.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) was an able advocate for his constituents in general and for Swan Hunter in particular. Like several hon. Members, he stressed the need for the landing platform helicopter vessel and welcomed the Government's intimation that there may be more definite moves on that in the near future.

The hon. Member for landlocked Somerset and Frome (Mr. Robinson) spoke with considerable insight for a landlubber. I think he was unique in raising the representational role of the Royal Navy. Again, he stressed the role of the LPH.

As ever, the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) was honest enough perhaps to impede his promotion up the ladder of office when he referred to the fact that Portland will lose under Government plans. He finds it difficult to accept the decision because, as with so many other Government decisions, it was based on spurious figures, as he correctly pointed out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised an issue with which we are familiar and on

which he has expertise—the dangers of pollution, particularly from tankers. Rockall was mentioned specifically, but he also referred to the wider implications in the Gulf on which he has spoken before.

Mr. Dalyell: Tankers may not be the worst offenders; often it is ordinary ships.

Mr. Reid: I am grateful for the clarification. Time means that I have to simplify many of the issues raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) spoke of the uncertainties of the present. Whether we agree or disagree with Government decisions, the instability and uncertainty of their political approach are undermining morale in the Royal Navy and in the other services.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) spoke from a position of considerable experience and valour, which has been suitably rewarded by decoration. He questioned the method of specification and design for ships, a matter not raised by anyone else. I hope that Ministers will pay attention to what he said.

The dangers of nuclear proliferation were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and, as ever, he gave his full support to the policy of the Opposition Front Bench on nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, I did not hear his speech, but I am sure that that accurately reflects the burden of his comments.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who is a well-known expert on the RAF, cast his net wider and remarked upon the timing of these debates and the importance of re-establishing the tradition of commitment to real defence of his party. I suppose, in an oblique way, he supported what we have been saying for some time, that the Government can no longer claim to be the defenders of Britain. I am sorry that they have lost that tradition, but I am glad that it is admitted on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson) also welcomed the LPH and stressed the need for amphibiosity. He too has been an advocate for his constituents on that.

I hope that I have covered most of the contributions. In defence debates we always enjoy a range of expertise which is missing from other debates. I look forward to the speech by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. Perhaps we should now refer to him also as the keeper of the historic buildings of the Ministry of Defence. A new concept is always introduced in defence debates. My hon. Friends will recall the new concept which was introduced to the Army debate by the former Secretary of State for Defence —the concept of the cunning plan. A la Baldrick, he told us some time ago that the Government never intended to stick by the decisions in "Options for Change" and that all the changes were part of a cunning plan which he did not reveal to the House.

In the debate we had a new concept, as ever, from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who opened the debate—the concept of downsizing. There is now no such thing as a cut in the Ministry of Defence but a considerable amount of downsizing. We also had the concept of "about 40", with which I am familiar. When someone asks me my age, I say, "It is about 40." In that case, it is meant to conceal an upward rise.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: It is certainly not about 35 or 30.

Dr. Reid: I agree. In the case of the Royal Navy there is grave suspicion in all parts of the House that when the Minister says "about 40" it is meant to conceal a reduction to fewer than 40.

As several hon. Members have said, it is appropriate for us to discuss the future of the Royal Navy as we prepare to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic. That titanic and heroic struggle in which many thousands of allied, merchant and Royal Navy seamen perished should stand as a testament to two enduring facts. The first of them is that Britain's security has always depended fundamentally on the defence of our maritime communications. Secondly, the Royal Navy strength has been its ability to adapt to new challenges. An example of that is that the fleet of small escort vessels that fought the convoy battles of May 1943 would have been unrecognisable to those who had witnessed the massive battle fleet encounter at Jutland only 27 years before. In the same way, the operation currently being undertaken in the Adriatic on behalf of the United Nations requires very different skills from those employed in the battle of the Atlantic.

The changing face of the Royal Navy over the past century shows that sea power is an evolving concept which obliges policy makers and military planners alike to remain alert to the implications of changes in the strategic environment rather than remain wedded to outdated assumptions. That lack of clarity is the base of most people's concerns about the Government's approach. As we seek to come to terms with the end of the cold war and plan for the future, that lesson is as important as ever, but, sadly, it is a lesson that the Government seem determined to ignore.

In the past two years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Government have singularly failed to outline a convincing vision of the Royal Navy's future role or Britain's future security requirements generally. The redefinition of Britain's defence role was outlined in the 1992 White Paper and amounts to little more than a statement of the obvious. It offers less insight into the missions that our armed forces will be asked to undertake than the definition that it seeks to replace. It cannot be regarded as strategy in any proper sense of the word.

The main consequence of that is that vital policy decisions are being made in a strategic vacuum without any criteria against which their merit can be judged, because we do not know the policy objectives that they are meant to meet. The end product is not a Royal Navy reshaped to meet the challenges of the future, because no vision of the future has been outlined. Instead, the Royal Navy is being asked to perform the same tasks as before but with fewer resources.

As with "Options for Change" generally, the Government's approach to the restructuring of the Royal Navy has been as inept as it has been craven. Difficult decisions have been avoided for as long as possible, some decisions have been taken and then reversed, policy changes have been surreptitiously leaked to the press before Parliament has been informed and Ministers have dithered at length. The most disgraceful example of that conduct was the way in which the announcement that a further 5,000 Royal Navy personnel are to be made redundant was timed to coincide with the beginning of the Easter recess. Conservative Members criticised the Minister for that. The result of that announcement will be

[Dr. Reid]

a lowering of morale and a growing sense of cynicism among service personnel who have become tired of the Government's prevarication on the issues.

The overall picture emerging from that chaos is one of desperate improvisation instead of coherent planning, a climate of insecurity which threatens to paralyse the entire decision-making process. How can we expect the Royal Navy to approach the task of restructuring itself with any sense of confidence in such an environment, and how many more redundancies can it expect to be announced? How many procurement projects can it expect to be axed? As hon. Members have said in relation to surface ships that will be available to the Royal Navy, there is nothing more specific than the vague figure of "about 40" frigates and destroyers.

The position of the submarine fleet is scarcely any clearer. Having been told that the Royal Navy would have a fleet of about 16 submarines, three quarters of which would be nuclear powered, we are now told that the Government are considering selling the four Upholder class conventional submarines before they even enter service, presumably leaving the Royal Navy with a fleet of around 12 submarines, none of which would be SSKs. Can the Government confirm that they are considering that option? If so, will the Minister tell us on what grounds? Do we no longer have any requirement for the unique, inshore capabilities offered by SSKs? If so, we would like to hear the argument now, instead of learning about it through the press.

The chaos over the decision whether to award the Trident refit contract to Rosyth or Devonport is typical of the Government's approach. The dithering of the Government has reached, even by the standards of the Ministry of Defence, absurd proportions. Having initially proceeded on the basis that Rosyth would continue to refit our ballistic missile submarines, the Government invested approximately £150 million in constructing purpose-built facilities to carry out the work, only to reopen the issue last year by asking both yards to submit new bids.

Since then, all that we have had is repeated delays, conflicting rumours and endless excuses. The long-term viability of both yards is at stake on that strategic issue. The Government must make a decision soon. For the Labour party, only a solution that guarantees the continued operation of both yards will be acceptable. Anything less would be a false economy, from the point of view both of maintaining effective competition for future refit contracts and of the strategic requirements of our naval infrastructure.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman realise what are the automatic countermeasure procedures in connection with nuclear problems? At Rosyth there are no dwellings in the area, but there are dwellings at Devonport, and that makes a big difference when one is making judgments.

Dr. Reid: I accept that. I know that the hon. Gentleman has studied the issue and been a keen supporter of keeping both going, but he has done so with honesty, because there are benefits and advantages at both yards. To give the surface fleet to Devonport and the refit for the submarines to Rosyth would offer the best possibility of maintaining both yards for the longest period. The important thing is that we have a decision on the matter soon.

The Government's morbid fear of the concept of a defence review is the cause of the continuing crisis in the defence budget. As has been said—I think by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East—a defence review is not an easy way out. Quite the opposite: a defence review will face all of us with challenges. A defence review, matching resources to commitments within an overall budget programme, will involve hard decisions. A Labour Government would embark on that process knowing that some of those decisions would be unpopular, but at least we would not take the craven way out of struggling from pillar to post, cutting here, slicing there and downsizing everywhere else to avoid those hard decisions. My God, we are asking our armed forces to risk their lives while Ministers will not even risk their political careers to carry out a defence review.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation in the Balkans and the spread of new risks demand such a review. The time is right to make progress on other issues of mutual interest, particulary in conventional naval arms control. The past omission of naval forces from the process of conventional arms control was an anomaly that should now be rectified. Exploratory talks on that issue would be a welcome start, and I believe that the Russians would be receptive to that idea.

For the Royal Navy to enhance its capabilities, it will require three things—a sufficient number of surface escort vessels, well-trained and well-equipped amphibious forces and the right logistics back-up. While I have already shown concern about the Government's intentions with regard to the size of the surface fleet, I welcome the fact that progress has been made in modernising our amphibious forces with the decision to proceed with the acquisition of a helicopter carrier and two new commando assault ships.

However, I must raise two issues of concern. First, will the Minister assure us that the LPH will be equipped with enough modern helicopters for her to operate effectively? We are all aware of the chronic shortage of helicopters, which is affecting all three services, and I would welcome a sign from the Government that they intend to order a further batch of EH101s.

Secondly, may we be assured that the combat readiness and availability of the Royal Marines will not be affected by overstretch in the infantry? It seems inevitable, given that overstretch and the contraction in the number of infantry units, that the Royal Marines will be forced to take an increasing share of the burden in Northern Ireland. Unless the Government are able to satisfy us that the emergency tour plot interval is extended to an acceptable period of not less than 24 months, serious doubts about the effectiveness of our amphibious forces and their main role will remain.

As to Britain's maritime nuclear capability, we welcome the 1991 decision taken in conjunction with our allies to remove all tactical nuclear weapons from Royal Navy surface ships as a constructive contribution to the disarmament process, but that decision sits uncomfortably beside the impending deployment of Trident and the Government's refusal to give a categorical assurance that there will be no increase of strategic nuclear warheads on the new submarines.

Any increase in the number of warheads above the current Polaris capacity of 192 would be unacceptable. It would send entirely the wrong signal to the former Soviet republics and to those emerging nations considering the acquisition of nuclear weapons. It would also be a breach of our obligations under the non-proliferation treaty to demonstrate restraint in our nuclear programme.

All the Government's reasons for supporting as many as 512 strategic warheads are entirely spurious. The United States and Russia have made significant progress in reducing the number of their strategic nuclear weapons, and we should be part of that process. I urge the Government to announce a freeze on the number of strategic warheads and to declare their intention to enter the disarmament process. My right hon. Friends and I look forward eventually to debating the 1992 defence White Paper and the 1993 White Paper, in which some apparent strategy may be revealed to us all.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): This interesting debate has included many good contributions from all parts of the House. I want fully to reply, and as so little time is left to me, it will be difficult to give way.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) asked about the time scale for getting the assault ships in service. The project definition is under way and replacements will be in service by the end of the decade. We are confident that the existing ships can run on until that time.

There were many comments about the Upholder class submarines—the SSKs—and I must tell the House that no decision has been made. It is wrong for anyone to rush to a conclusion just because of leaks that they have read in the newspapers. We are still considering that matter—which will be addressed, together with the number of frigates and destroyers, when the White Paper is published in July.

The hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) referred to the number of warheads on Trident. It is important to clear the picture on 512 warheads. That is a maximum, and I very much doubt that we will have that maximum number of warheads on Trident when it comes to be deployed.

No decision has been made about the number of warheads that will be used on Trident. In fact, it is not yet necessary to reach a decision. When that decision is reached, it will take into consideration the circumstances of the world in which we live at the time.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley asked what we are doing to make things safer for Clyde fishermen—we both have a great interest in that topic. Tests on the pingers to which the hon. Gentleman referred have been very encouraging. As he knows, we purchased some pingers and have been trialing them. There will be a full in-service trial with Clyde fishermen, and we shall work out the way ahead from there. The hon. Gentleman mentioned, in the context of Subfacts, that no one wants a repeat of the Antares disaster. That was probably one of the most gruelling problems and greatest tragedies with which I have had to deal during the five years that I have had this job. I certainly echo the hon. Gentleman's sentiments.

We are still discussing with the coastguard and with the Department of Transport how best Subfacts information can be broadcast in Scottish areas. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence are fully committed to the Subfacts scheme and they are doing everything they can to broadcast over all the waters that might be affected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) said that he is not a defence expert. That was rather modest of him, because he has taken a great interest in what has been happening in Plymouth, and has been a regular correspondent on behalf of his constituents. He pointed out that we now live in an uncertain world—a theme that has run through today's speeches. As he said, there was a certain predictability about the days of the cold war. The current uncertainty makes planning very difficult, and underlines the need for us to maintain our capabilities. We must be able to rebuild those capabilities within the longer warning times that we have talked about. Many of our defence capabilities cannot be rebuilt overnight, and it is important for us to be able to rebuild them if the international position becomes more difficult.

My hon. Friend made a passionate plea—which I entirely understand—for a decision on the Trident facility. He wants it to go to Devonport, because it would benefit his constituents. I can only say that we shall make a decision as soon as we can, but—as has been pointed out by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement—it is important for us to work out all the figures properly so that we reach the right decision, rather than hurrying and reaching the wrong one. We have had a tremendous amount of new information from the different contractors at both Rosyth and Devonport, which we have had to consider very carefully.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned the horrors of Bosnia, and made the point that such horrors are being repeated in many other parts of the world. He cited some 25 areas of conflict. That raises an interesting question: do we actually want to deploy our defence capabilities, and our remarkable service men, in 25 different areas? If that is to be our aim in the future, we should not be considering such minuscule numbers; we should be talking about 10 times our current service contingent, and an astronomical defence budget. When we consider the problems of the world and our own interests, it is important for us to recognise that we cannot support a much larger defence budget than we have at the present. There is a limit to the extent to which we wish to deploy our service men in dangerous areas throughout the world.

I am sorry to say that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish then lapsed into his old bad habits, and came with an anti-nuclear tirade. He brought out the old chestnut that we have come to associate with the left wing of the Labour party—which, of course, has the great advantage of consistency in that it has been anti-nuclear throughout, rather than emulating the 180-degree turn performed by the Labour Front Bench.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of our dependence on the United States for Trident. It is true that the United States is contracted to sell us those missiles, but I see no reason to believe that it will not abide by the deal. Indeed, as it will be extremely lucrative for the United States, it would be very surprising if that happened. Our dependence on the

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

United States will then itself depend on the servicing of the missiles, but we do not expect them to be serviced more often than every six to eight years. Our subsequent dependence on the United States will thus be very limited.

I am sure that others will echo the tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) to those who served in the Royal and Merchant Navies in the battle for the Atlantic. My hon. Friend then said that he saw no sign of a peace dividend, even in the distant future. That raises a major problem that I am experiencing with the Select Committee on Defence, which considers that we should not amalgamate any regiments in the British Army, and that it would be outrageous to make any reductions in the number of ships, or in any other part of the Navy or the RAF.

We must try to put all this into context. Are we talking about an increase in the defence budget? If so, where is the money to come from? Will the health budget or the social security budget be reduced, or will the Government simply borrow more money?

I think it is about time that defence expenditure was mentioned. It is not enough merely to say how sad it is that we are losing our capabilities. No one wants to lose capabilities, but it is important that we have a defence budget with which we can live, and which reflects our ability to pay. If that is the basis on which we work—certainly, it is the basis on which I work—we must make difficult decisions about how to align our resources with our capabilities.

Mr. Wilkinson: Surely there is much merit in the argument so eloquently advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) that the first priority of Her Majesty's Government must be to assure the nation's defence and that savings can be found from the social security budget, which has been spiralling virtually out of control, and from the more intelligent use of manpower —for instance, by the use of reserves.

Mr. Hamilton: We can all think of ways of trying to save money, but if we are not to make any savings at all we shall need considerably more money than we have now. I have difficulty with whoever it was who said that the situation had changed since "Options for Change." That is absolutely right. The announcement was made in July 1990. There have indeed been changes since then—changes for the better. In July 1990, the Soviet Union still existed. Since then it has disintegrated. The threat from Russia is less now than it was at that time. If one is talking about the security of the United Kingdom, the fact is that it is now more secure than it was in July 1990.

It could be argued, of course, that since 1990 the whole of Europe has become more unstable. That raises an interesting question—whether it should be only the United Kingdom that becomes involved in deploying troops to all these different places and the degree to which that burden should be shared by other European nations, whose absence, with the exception of France, from any involvement has been notable.

My hon. Friends the Members for Upminster and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) are concerned about fishery protection. They will both be glad to know that we have agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to continue fisheries protection into 1994.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow is also concerned about the future of hydrography. The Royal Navy continues to carry out those services and to maintain these skills. We are talking about chartering ships, but there will be Royal Navy crews on those ships. In those circumstances, the Royal Navy will continue to maintain those skills.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster constantly talks about the Royal Navy being incapable of meeting its commitments. However, he had now dreamt up a new commitment: that the Royal Navy should be made responsible for putting down piracy in the Indian and Pacific oceans. If we go down that road, we shall need a navy that is very much bigger than the one that we have now. We shall do what we can to help anybody who is the victim of piracy, but the Royal Navy would have to be in the vicinity of the piracy. They would not sail past and do nothing. But to make the Royal Navy responsible for piracy would be a large commitment, which would make almost everything else that it does pale into insignificance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) wants to give the LPH a name. I was surprised to hear him say that, because my hon. Friend knows all about ships. He ought to know that the Royal Navy does not name a ship until it is launched. I was told the name of a ship when I laid its keel. That ship was the Vigilant, the third of the Trident submarines. My hon. Friend will have to wait until at least the keel is laid before he is told the name. However, my hon. Friend has got a point: that this wretched thing has already had a large number of names. It started life as an aviation support ship. Then, for some reason, we wanted to call it a landing platform for helicopters. My hon. Friend made a plea for "amphibiosity" and welcomed our commitment to replace the amphibious fleet.

My hon. Friend also referred to the fact that the CVSs, the aircraft carriers, will need to be replaced. It is too early in the day to talk in those terms. They have still got a good deal of life in them and should continue in service for some time yet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South made a helpful speech. He pointed out that he did not want the skills of the fleet maintenance and repair organisation to be neglected. I accept that it is important to maintain those skills. He made a plea, which I totally support, that we must not let the desire to do something in the Balkans override the military realities there.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) paid tribute to the skill of the work force there and the quality of the ships built by Swan Hunter. I agree with what he said. We have no argument whatsoever about those skills.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised the important issue of tankers and ships cleaning oil into the sea. That is not the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence but we would, of course, report any ship doing that to the authorities. The Royal Navy carries stocks of dispersants so that, if there were a major disaster, we would be able to help.

The killing of whales and the possibility of a sanctuary in the south Antarctic seas are not matters to which the Royal Navy can extend its responsibilities. The chances of a Royal Navy ship being in an area where whales are being killed are not very great—perhaps with the exception of

the Falklands—but, once again, the Navy would report any incident to the relevant authorities. However, it cannot be held solely responsible.

On the Gulf——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

Scottish Ambulance Service (Alness)

10 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I wish to present a petition on behalf of more than 8,000 constituents in Ross, Cromarty and Skye who reside in and around the communities of Alness, Evanton and Invergordon.

The petition

Declares that there is strong opposition locally to the proposal by the Scottish Ambulance Association to transfer to Dingwall the ambulances presently stationed in Alness.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons takes note of the local concern being expressed and gives its support to the efforts being made locally to identify an alternative site for an ambulance depot in Alness.

And the Petitioners remain, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Cambodia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I welcome the presence of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), because, unlike the Ministers who have responded when I have raised this issue on previous occasions, he has been to Cambodia and played an important part in the developments which have led to the election that we now anticipate.

My right hon. Friend will know that I was in Cambodia in early March. I was there with members of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and we considered all factors which were emerging and which had emerged. However, my concern is what is happening now and how the election process is proceeding since 9 April when the campaigning began.

First, is Britain satisfied that, under present conditions, the elections will be free and fair, or as near as possible? We are all aware of the violations committed by the PDK, or the Khmer Rouge, which has increasingly been attacking personnel of the United Nations transitional authority in Cambodia and massacring the Vietnamese. They are called Vietnamese but, of course, we would regard them as Cambodians because they were born there and, in any other circumstances, would be regarded as citizens. However, they are being targeted specifically by the Khmer Rouge.

As I understand it, only yesterday 200 rounds were fired into a Chinese engineering unit. It appears that the intensity of the operation is increasing, and I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has any information as to whether the Khmer Rouge is determined to try to disrupt the election. Since 9 April, I have heard from a colleague working in Cambodia. He said:

> "The KR have increased their presence from 5 to 14 districts in this province . . . Their killing of the Japanese UN Volunteer and his interpreter (April 8th) is unnerving our staff. The elections depend on the work of these volunteers. If the KR decide to make them so afraid they cannot work, then there will be no election."

I understand that more than 40 of the 400 volunteers have already said that they do not want to continue.

Secondly, disruption is also being caused by other parties. When I was there, I was disappointed to learn that the State of Cambodia Government were doing their best to disrupt other parties, even though they had been able to open offices in many parts of the country. I had hoped that, since we left, under the influence of Hun Sen, who had been travelling round the region trying to calm his party officials, that had died down.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could tell us whether that is true, or whether the fear expressed by Professor Reginald Austin, the director of the electoral component of UNTAC, was well founded. Professor Austin feared that the Khmer Rouge were aiming at UNTAC and killing its personnel, and that the State of Cambodia Government were aiming at the Opposition and making it difficult both for them and for UNTAC to ensure an open election. That would motivate the Khmer Rouge to conclude that the electoral process was designed to allow a State of Cambodia victory.

[Mr. Jim Lester]

I should like an update on how the Government, and our excellent ambassador in Phnom Penh, can report on the current situation as we approach the final lap of the election. I am especially concerned that we should know about the preparations for polling day and for the run-up to polling day, so as to ensure that there is no intimidation on the day. We need to know whether, when the election has been held, Her Majesty's Government and the whole UN operation will declare it to have been fair before the results are announced. There is considerable concern during these last few weeks before the election takes place on 24 May.

Secondly, I am concerned about aid. I know that my right hon. Friend went to the aid conference in Tokyo, at which a generous amount of money was pledged by many nations. Nevertheless, there have been concerns about the actual flows of aid in advance of the elections, and about whether the aid programmes, especially those targeted at health and education in rural areas, are getting through.

As my right hon. Friend will know, there is considerable concern, as there always has been, about the wide gap between Phnom Penh, which has benefited enormously from the United Nations presence, and the rural areas. There is concern, too, about the difficulties caused in the past by that gap. It is essential that the agreed aid programme is seen to benefit the widest possible range of the population, and especially that those who live far away from Phnom Penh are seen to receive a fair share.

Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether we are satisfied that Britain's contribution is speedy enough? We saw much of the work that was being done, and especially welcomed the presence of the sister of one of our hon. Friends, who was seconded to one of the departments in Cambodia, and was dealing with health, education and the English language. I should be grateful to be given some idea of what the British aid programme is doing, especially in terms of preparations for the immediate post-electoral period in June, July and August. If all goes well, a newly elected Government will then be sitting down to work out a constitution, and it will be important that all the necessary help for them to achieve that end is already geared up and available.

The third issue is de-mining. As my right hon. Friend will know, that problem causes widespread external concern. I believe that Cambodia is the most mined country in the world; I understand that one in every 236 people there is already a victim of mines of one sort or another. We saw some of the work of the HALO trust and of other de-mining groups from this country. But there still does not seem to be a sufficient sense of urgency about clearing the mines. Do we have any figures by now, perhaps from the Cambodia mines action centre, to tell us how many mines have been lifted, how many people have been trained and what sort of time scale we can imagine for the areas that need to be cleared?

Considering the number of mines that have been laid in Cambodia, and the difficulties caused by the paddy fields and by rain moving mines around, I realise that it will be almost impossible ever to say that the country has been de-mined. None the less, it would be of considerable interest, especially to people outside the country, to hear how high a priority the British Government give to that exercise. Of course, that problem does not apply to Cambodia alone; it has a wider connotation, but Cambodia is the area about which people are most concerned at the moment.

The fourth area relates to the post-election period. I am not anticipating what the Foreign Affairs Select Committee will say, because we have not deliberated on the matter yet. However, from my long connection with the country, I believe that Britain should retain its influence and involvement in Phnom Penh after the election. Our contribution is widely regarded as very fair and balanced.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, English is critical for the new Government and the new structures. We should seriously consider maintaining our presence there and we should argue for a continued United Nations presence after August, although obviously reduced from its present level.

The traumatic and terrible history of Cambodia, the degrees of antipathy and hatred and the genocide of the Khmer Rouge mean that the country needs stability and a period to rearrange and readjust the society. There is a desperate need to create structures at local and national levels.

When we were in the country, it was clear that, although the UN had introduced a policing component, there was no legal system for the UN police to use if they arrested someone for any form of crime. We have now had to bring in judges from outside under UN control and defence lawyers to try those who have already been arrested for committing offences both from the state of Cambodia side and from the Khmer Rouge. That is an example of how desperate is the need to create what we would regard as basic structures for a country if it is going to succeed. When we consider the troubled history of that country, neither the international community nor Britain should walk away.

From our experience of driving from Battambang to Poipet and then on to Bangkok, it seemed that the new Government of Thailand were taking their relationship with the rest of the world much more seriously than before. We were encouraged to see that, at that time, they had closed the border and had stopped timber imports across the border with Khmer Rouge-controlled areas. Although they could do nothing about gemstones because they are too small, the new Government of Thailand seemed to want to co-operate with the international community on the vital issue of closing the border which must be achieved if we are to impose sanctions that might influence the future activities of the Khmer Rouge.

It is possible that some people over-exaggerate the threat of the Khmer Rouge. The activities of the Khmer Rouge since we left that country have certainly not made anyone feel more comfortable. As I understood it, when we were there, the Khmer Rouge controlled only 15 per cent. of the land territory. I am not sure what proportion of the population it controlled, but as 4·6 million people are already registered for the election, I suspect that the Khmer Rouge controlled only a relatively small number.

My final point relates to the concern that many of us have about the tremendous international exercise in Cambodia—the biggest exercise in which the UN has ever been involved. The long-drawn-out process enabled us to obtain the Paris agreement. There was then the defection of the Khmer Rouge as it dishonoured its signature to that agreement.

When we discussed the future with the Prince Sihanouk, he was very much concerned that there should be no partition of his country even though the dimensions, as I have already described, are not that great. It was his overwhelming concern that there should be no partition of Cambodia in the sense of a retained Khmer Rouge region.

He seemed much more prepared to consider the future involvement of the PDK in a Government that he would seek to lead, should he be elected president, than have that party—after disowning and turning its back on the electoral process and undermining the Paris agreement—then be rewarded with the offer of being party to a future Government. All Committee members felt that that was completely out of court and that we should not give it any encouragement whatever.

If all goes well and there is an election that can be judged a fair indication of what the people want, there will still be immense difficulty with the rump of the Khmer Rouge. We do not know whether the new Government will have military supplies to enable them to put an end to this long-drawn-out struggle and bring peace to a country that has had infinitely more than its share of suffering by comparison with any other country in the world today.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) for initiating this debate. In the House, he has an unequalled knowledge of Cambodia and an unsurpassed care for the future of its people. In his capacity as a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, he was there recently—indeed, since I was there. He has raised a number of important issues, which I should like to cover one by one.

The Paris agreements on a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict were signed on 23 October 1991. Since then, we have done much to implement them—but there is a long way to go. The United Nations operation in Cambodia has had its successes and failures, but it is encouraging that the international community is still firmly committed to the future of Cambodia and the goals set out in the Paris agreements. As one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, we have played an active role in trying to bring an end to the 12-year civil war in Cambodia.

The Paris agreements were a major achievement, offering the Cambodian people a new future in which they can be free from tyranny and the threat of genocide and from foreign occupation and interference. The agreements mandated the United Nations transitional authority in Cambodia, under the leadership of the United Nations Secretary General's special representative, Mr. Akashi, to monitor the ceasefire; oversee the human rights situation; supervise the disarmament and demobilisation of the factions' armed forces; repatriate more than 350,000 refugees from camps on the Thai-Cambodian border; supervise the work of existing administrative structures to create a "neutral political environment"; and hold free and fair elections to take place from 23 to 27 May 1993. As my hon. Friend said, UNTAC is the largest and most ambitious operation ever mounted by the United Nations. It comprises some 16,000 military, 4,000 civilians and 3,000 police personnel as well as almost 60,000 locally engaged staff.

The United Nations has covered much ground towards filling its mandate. Almost all the refugees who were formerly in camps on the Thai-Cambodian border have returned of their own free will to Cambodia—largely to the towns and villages from which they came. It has been a huge operation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its organisation deserve the congratulations of everyone. According to the UNHCR's special representative for Cambodia, only one Cambodian died during the repatriation.

UNHCR recognises that there is still much work to be done to ensure the successful reintegration of those who have returned. As a consequence, in February, together with the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, it launched an appeal—to which we have contributed—for a further $53 million to cover reintegration assistance until early 1994.

At the ministerial meeting on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Cambodia in Tokyo in June 1992, to which my hon. Friend referred, the international community pledged $880 million for the reconstruction of Cambodia. It was always envisaged that this would be disbursed over a number of years. Up to February this year, some $94.3 million had been provided for aid projects in Cambodia.

Many have criticised the pace of the disbursement of aid. Part of the problem stems from continuing disagreements among the Cambodian factions, leading to the Supreme National Council's failure to sign an agreement with the World bank. We have urged all the parties to settle their differences quickly. The flow of aid is likely to increase substantially once a new Government are in place in Phnom Penh.

The United Kingdom has pledged some $30 million of humanitarian and development assistance since the signing of the Paris agreements in October 1991. Of that sum, more than $23 million has been committed, principally on the UNHCR repatriation programme, funding the grass-roots projects of voluntary agencies, a major malaria control programme through the World Health Organisation, an English language teacher-training project and various water supply projects at Battambang and in rural areas. We are working on projects to spend the balance and shall continue to work for Cambodia's reconstruction both before and after a new Government are installed.

We are very conscious of the fact, which my hon. Friend drew to the attention of the House, that one of the most pressing problems facing Cambodia is the presence of large numbers of mines. Since April 1992, UNTAC, with a British training team in the lead, has been training Cambodians to clear mines. As on 17 April 1993, three international training teams and 20 supervisory teams were operating in Cambodia; 2,184 Cambodian de-miners, 51 Cambodian supervisors and 21 Cambodian instructors had been trained. We have also provided money to the HALO Trust, a British non-governmental organisation, which is also involved in de-mining in Cambodia.

According to UNTAC figures at mid-April, Cambodians trained by UNTAC had destroyed or recovered 14,343 mines and munitions in Cambodia, 9,474 anti-personnel mines, 20 anti-tank mines and 4,869 pieces of unexploded ordinance. By comparison, non-governmental organisations had cleared 2,171 mines and munitions. If there are any more up-to-date figures, I will give them to my hon. Friend.

[Mr. Alastair Goodlad]

The task ahead is immense. It was never envisaged that UNTAC itself would clear the mines. UNTAC's job was to train Cambodians to ensure that they had the skills and knowledge to continue the task of determining long after UNTAC had left. The Cambodia mine action centre, established in November, is currently drawing up a programme of mine clearance lasting until 1997. The first stage of this programme, lasting until July 1993, is being implemented fully with funds supplied largely by UNTAC.

Cambodia's tragic history demands special measures to ensure that there can be no recurrence of the atrocities committed between 1975 and 1978. Strong provisions to safeguard human rights are a prominent feature of the Paris agreements. All the factions have now signed the major human rights instruments, and we intend to make sure that they live up to their undertakings. However, while we are committed to the principle of self-determination for the Cambodian people, we believe that it would be incomprehensible and unacceptable if those intimately associated with past atrocities, notably Pol Pot, Ieng Sari, Ta Mok and certain others, were to re-enter Cambodia's political life and attempt to return to power.

UNTAC has faced many problems since its deployment on 15 March 1992. It has not received the co-operation from the various Cambodian factions which it was entitled to expect. Ceasefire violations have continued. More seriously, the Khmer Rouge has denied UNTAC access to many areas of Cambodia under their control. As my hon. Friend said, it controls about 10 per cent. of the total, situated largely in the north and west of the country. The Khmer Rouge has refused to canton and demobilise its armed forces, as required under phase 2 of the ceasefire. It has withdrawn from the elections, and is believed to have been responsible for many of the attacks on ethnic Vietnamese in the past year, which have left more than 100 people dead.

We have repeatedly condemned both the actions and the attitude of the Khmer Rouge. We support fully UN Security Council resolution 792 which, inter alia, called for measures to be taken against those parties which failed to comply with the military provisions of the Paris agreements. We have also urged UNTAC to take measures to safeguard the lives of all Cambodian civilians, regardless of their ethnic origins.

There has been much criticism of the decision to include the Khmer Rouge in the peace process, but we must remember that the civil war in Cambodia could not have been brought to an end if the comprehensive political settlement had excluded any of the main parties to the dispute. To have done so would only have prolonged the war and condemned the Cambodian people to indefinite misery. All the other Cambodian parties accepted the necessity of including the Khmer Rouge in the settlement. Despite the Khmer Rouge's behaviour over the last few months, we continue to believe that this decision was right.

We, like the other Cambodian factions and all the signatories of the Paris agreement, continue to believe that the elections should go ahead as planned, even though the Khmer Rouge have excluded themselves. Although UNTAC has been denied access to many areas under Khmer Rouge control, nearly 4·7 million Cambodians have registered to vote—an estimated 90 per cent. of those eligible, and a clear sign of the Cambodian people's desire to decide their future. The international community has called on all the parties to abide by their commitment under the Paris agreements to respect the results of the elections.

We are concerned, as is everybody, at the continuing attacks against UNTAC personnel in Cambodia. Over ten have now lost their lives, but not all the deaths can be attributed to the Khmer Rouge; and it is still unclear whether the Khmer Rouge have decided to attack UNTAC and the electoral process to attempt to disrupt and discredit the election. Unfortunately, there are likely to be further attacks and further deaths; but the international community will hold its nerve and complete the task it set itself more than 18 months ago.

We have also been concerned in recent months at the levels of intimidation of the other political parties by the State of Cambodia, and have encouraged UNTAC to take all necessary measures to guarantee a neutral political environment, including increased protection of party offices. That has had some effect, and the number of complaints about the state of Cambodia's behaviour by other political parties has dropped since the election campaign began on 6 April.

It is impossible at this stage to predict the outcome of the election. Provided UNTAC judges the result to be free and fair, we will recognise the result and encourage the new constituent assembly to agree a new constitution and to form a new Government within the three months laid down under the Paris agreements.

It is our firm belief that a new Government, representative of the wishes of the Cambodian people and with the recognition of the international community, offers the best hope for the future of Cambodia. We recognise, however, that the Khmer Rouge will continue to pose a threat to the stability of Cambodia. We have asked UNTAC to consider ways to ensure that the new Government can counter this, including assistance with the formation and training of a new Cambodian army.

Ultimately, it will be for the new Government to decide whether to seek international help. We believe that such assistance will best be handled on a bilateral basis after UNTAC's mandate expires. The United Nations will maintain a presence in Cambodia for the foreseeable future through its specialised agencies and programmes.

We recognised at the time of the signing of the Paris agreements that huge practical tasks awaited the United Nations in bringing lasting peace, stability and self-determination to the long-suffering people of Cambodia. The fact that today we are looking forward to the holding of free and fair elections in less than two weeks' time is testament to the ground that UNTAC has covered. The House and my hon. Friend, who has raised the matter, can rest assured that we and the international community remain committed to seeing that the Paris agreements are implemented as fully as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 May 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Osteopaths Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

New clause 1

DATA PROTECTION AND ACCESS TO PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION

'.—(1) In section 2(1) of the Access to Health Records Act 1990 (definition of health professionals), after paragraph (f) there shall be inserted—

"(ff) a registered osteopath;".

(2) The following instruments shall be amended as mentioned in subsection (3)—

(a) the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order 1987;

(b) the Access to Personal Files (Social Services) Regulations 1989;

(c) the Access to Personal Files (Social Work) (Scotland) Regulations 1989;

(d) the Access to Personal Files (Housing) Regulations 1989; and

(e) the Access to Personal Files (Housing) (Scotland) Regulations 1992.

(3) In each case, at the end of the Table in the Schedule there shall be inserted—

"Registered osteopath Osteopaths Act 1993, section 39."

(4) The reference in section 2(1) of the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 to the order mentioned in subsection (2)(a) shall be read as a reference to that order as amended by this section.

(5) The amendments made by this section shall not be taken to prejudice the power to make further orders or (as the case may be) regulations varying or revoking the amended provisions.'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.34 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The proposal is a straightforward one. The Access to Health Records Act 1990 gives patients a right of access to their health records. It applies to records relating to the physical or mental health of an identifiable individual compiled by a health professional in connection with care and treatment. "Health professional" is defined without reference to osteopaths, and records compiled and held by an osteopath are therefore outside the scope of the Act.

As the main purpose of my Bill is to introduce a statutory registration scheme for osteopaths, to place the profession on the same footing as the other key health professions, it seems logical for individuals who have received treatment from an osteopath to be given the legal right of access to the records of that treatment.

The definition of "health professional" is the same across the whole range of legislation that deals with the individual's right of access to information about his own health. For the sake of consistency, it is again logical to include registered osteopaths in all the various legislation —that is especially important in respect of the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order, as the Access to Health Records Act applies only to records compiled in a written form. An individual's right of access to information held in computerised form is provided by the subject access provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): Scanning the horizon for good news this morning, I am happy to light upon the excellent Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss).

This new clause is an important proposal, which the Government strongly support. For many years, we have openly supported the principle that patients should, as a matter of course, have the right to know what has been written about them. The new clause extends to individuals who receive treatment from osteopaths the existing rights of patients to have access to their health records.

People have had a legal right of access to personal health information for some time now. Health records kept on computer are accessible to patients by means of section 21 of the Data Protection Act 1984, although certain information is exempt by virtue of the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order 1987. Those exemptions are necessary to protect the subject from serious harm to his physical or mental health and to protect the privacy of other identifiable individuals.

In 1987, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) successfully piloted on to the statute book the Access to Personal Files Act, which gave individuals the right of access to records not held on computer—usually described by the rather unsophisticated term "manual records"—but that right extended only to those manual records held by local authorities and local social services for the purposes respectively of their housing and social services functions.

Health records were excluded from the Access to Personal Files Act 1987 because, at that stage, the Government wanted to reach an agreement with the medical profession, which had reservations about the idea of a legal right of access to health records. The profession was concerned about the potential effects on patient care of patients being handed that right, and argued that arrangements for access should involve appropriate safeguards for patients, doctors and other health professionals. It recognised that, in any case, many doctors had long practised voluntary disclosure to patients of their personal records, and argued that legislation was not necessarily the right way in which to deal with the issue. Therefore, the Government undertook to enter into talks with the medical profession to see what could be achieved.

After discussions, which extended over two years, with representatives of the profession, a draft code on non-statutory access to health records was produced. That document was circulated widely for comments. The only reservations about the principle of access were raised by

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

the medical profession itself. For that reason, the Government concluded that agreement could not be reached on a non-statutory code which would match the expectations of the public and which would have the unequivocal support of the medical profession.

When the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) presented his Access to Health Records Bill in 1989, the Government decided to support it, subject to necessary safeguards because its provisions were entirely consistent with my Department's policy on access to records. The issue is not just letting patients see their own health records. Medical records are maintained for patient care and are used by doctors and other health professionals to help them in the diagnosis of patients. Records are thus used to record and advise other health professionals on the progress of care and treatment.

However, the primary purpose is to record what is in the best interests of patients and what is in the record may not always be in the best interests of the patient to know. For example, there may be circumstances in which the uncontrolled disclosure of information may cause harm or distress.

Therefore, the problem has been to ensure that information for patients is recorded properly, while providing safeguards for patients against the risks that some disclosures may bring. Some doctors are fond of using phrases and medical jargon in records which many people find incomprehensible. That is why the legislation provides that the applicant should be given a simple and clear explanation of the meaning of the record by a relevant health professional, whether or not the applicant requests clarification.

A right of access to records can be reassuring to patients who know that they may see their records at any time. If patients ask to see their records and detect misleading or inaccurate information, they can request that that information be corrected. The Access to Health Records Act 1987 specifically provides for that. One of the advantages of the right of access is that it forces those who compile records to think rather more carefully about what they write. Openness therefore acts as a safeguard against possible casual, ill-considered personal comments which are sometimes found on health records.

In paying tribute to hon. Members who have successfully introduced Bills that have given individuals greater access to records, I must also acknowledge the work of the Campaign for Freedom of Information in raising public consciousness on this issue. The campaign has argued with much success that people should have the right of access to information that affects them and to information that enables them to take decisions about their lives. Those principles lie at the very heart of the Government's policy on openness.

The patients charter has highlighted the existing right of access to one's own health records. That, coupled with the right to be given detailed information on local health services, enables patients to make more informed decisions and illustrates the development of a more patient-centred health service taking account of the wishes of patients. With access to information, patients are empowered to play a greater role in decisions that affect them.

The issue of patients' access to their own health records is part of the wider issue of the provision of information to patients. Before legislation, there was a great deal of evidence that patients were not given as much information about their condition as they would like. For example, a survey of patients' satisfaction in general practice found that lack of information concerning treatment was the most frequently reported deficiency in the service provided.

Access to health records has provided an important new freedom to people, particularly because we should all be encouraged to take more responsibility for our health. We increasingly want to know what to do to keep ourselves healthy and what we can do to improve our chances of a quick recovery when we are ill. We want to be able to discuss our treatment with doctors and the other health professionals involved in caring for us, to understand what we are being asked to consent to and to know the risks, alternatives and chances of success.

Of course, access to the written record is not an alternative to discussion with professionals. However, I am sure that being able to see and understand what has been recorded about one helps to make that discussion more informed and equal and it will therefore become a more natural process between patient and professional.

The Government welcome and support the new clause. Given the enhanced status that the Bill gives to the profession of osteopathy in the field of health, extending patients' rights of access to the records of a registered osteopath seems the natural and logical progression.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): We welcome and support the new clause. As the Minister said, in a Bill that is designed to protect patients' rights and access to osteopaths in terms of training and the quality of service that patients receive from osteopaths, it is entirely right that they should have access to their own records and protection in that way.

I sincerely hope that the positive way in which we have started our discussion on the Bill today is a sign that we shall be able to progress speedily through a Bill which should have been on the statute book a long time ago and which has the support of all parties—although representatives of one party are absent from the Chamber today.

9.45 pm

I expect that the Liberal Democrats are still celebrating, and we would not want to take that from them after their spectacular victories against the Government—*[Interruption.]* I could recount all the shire counties that were lost——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. A general reference to that may be acceptable, but we do not need to explore the depths.

Ms Primarolo: I was encouraged by some sedentary comments, and I stand corrected, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I can think of no better basis from which the Government can look to the horizon to redeem themselves than to improve and develop the national health service and to take the message from the electorate yesterday that they expect the Government to do that and that they have not approved of the Government's progress thus far. I therefore hope that we shall be able to support all the proposals in the Bill and conclude our business in good time so that we can return to our constituencies and continue the work that we were doing yesterday.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 3

APPEALS AGAINST DECISIONS OF THE HEALTH COMMITTEE

'.—(1) Any person with respect to whom a decision of the Health Committee is made under section 23 may, before the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the date on which notification of the decision is sent to him, appeal against it in accordance with the provisions of this section.

(2) An appeal under subsection (1) shall lie to an appeal tribunal, consisting of a chairman and two other members, established for the purposes of the appeal in accordance with rules made by the General Council for the purposes of this section.

(3) The General Council shall make rules as to the procedure to be followed by an appeal tribunal hearing an appeal under this section.

(4) The rules may, in particular, make similar provision to that made by virtue of section 26(2)(d), (f), (g), (h), (i) or (j).

(5) No decision against which an appeal may be made under this section shall have effect before—

(a) the expiry of the period within which such an appeal may be made; or

(b) the appeal is withdrawn or otherwise disposed of.

(6) The chairman of an appeal tribunal—

(a) shall be selected in accordance with rules made by the General Council; and

(b) shall be qualified as mentioned in section 27(4).

(7) Each of the other two members of an appeal tribunal shall be selected in accordance with rules made by the General Council—

(a) one of them being a fully registered osteopath, and

(b) the other being a registered medical practitioner.

(8) The rules may not provide for the selection of any member of an appeal tribunal to be by the General Council.

(9) The chairman of an appeal tribunal shall appoint a person approved by the members of the tribunal to act as clerk of the tribunal.

(10) Subject to any provision made by the rules, an appeal tribunal shall sit in public and shall sit—

(a) in Northern Ireland, in the case of an osteopath whose registered address is in Northern Ireland;

(b) in Scotland, in the case of an osteopath whose registered address is in Scotland; and

(c) in England and Wales, in any other case.

(11) On any appeal under this section—

(a) the appeal shall be by way of a rehearing of the case;

(b) the General Council shall be the respondent; and

(c) the tribunal hearing the appeal shall have power to make any decision which the Health Committee had power to make under section 23.

(12) An appeal tribunal shall have the same powers of interim suspension as the Health Committee has under section 24(1)(b) and that section shall have effect in relation to suspension orders made by appeal tribunals with the necessary modifications.

(13) No person shall be required by any rules made under this section to give any evidence or produce any document or other material at a hearing held by an appeal tribunal which he could not be compelled to give or produce in civil proceedings in any court in that part of the United Kingdom in which the hearing takes place.

(14) An appeal tribunal shall have power to award costs.

(15) Any expenses reasonably incurred by a tribunal, including any incurred in connection with the appointment of a clerk, shall be met by the General Council.'.—*[Mr. Moss]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Moss: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments:

No. 18, in clause 30, page 24, line 12 leave out 'of the Health Committee is made under section 23' and insert 'is made by an appeal tribunal hearing an appeal under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*'.

No. 19 in page 24, line 21, at end insert—

'( ) An appeal under subsection (1)(b) may only be on a point of law.

No. 20, in page 24, line 24, leave out 'may appear as' and insert 'shall be the'.

No. 21, in page 24, line 39, after 'Committee' insert 'or appeal tribunal'.

No. 22, in page 24, line 42, leave out subsection (8).

No. 23, in page 25, line 7, leave out from 'by' to 'rules', in line 8, and insert

'—

(a) the Professional Conduct Committee,

(b) the Health Committee, or

(c) an appeal tribunal hearing an appeal under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*,

under'.

No. 24, in page 25, line 8, after '(h)' insert 'or under any corresponding rules made by virtue of section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* (4)'.

No. 28, in page 26, line 20, leave out 'or 17' and insert '17 or *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*'.

Mr. Moss: The central purpose of the Bill is to establish a statutory registration system for osteopaths to provide members of the public with the assurance that, in the future, anyone calling himself or herself an osteopath, is adequately trained, properly qualified and fully competent to practise osteopathy, and that their professional practice is regulated by effective methods of control.

In addition to providing those safeguards for the public, it is equally important that the statutory scheme protects the human rights of osteopaths and provides them with an appeals system which is firmly rooted in the principles of natural justice.

As currently drafted, the Bill provides an aggrieved osteopath with a right of appeal against decisions of the professional conduct committee and health committee to Her Majesty in Council—that is, to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. I remind the House that those two committees are the fitness to practise committees with powers to suspend an osteopath's registration, impose conditions on his or her continuing to practise or, in the case of the professional conduct committee, to erase his or her name from the register.

Providing appeals against decisions of the health committee on matters of fact as well as of law would be a unique feature of the osteopaths' scheme among those governing other health professionals. The Judicial Committee is, however, concerned that appeals on matters of fact are liable to raise complicated issues of technical evidence on someone's medical condition and their consequent ability to practise which would fall outside the scope of its competence to determine. Therefore, new clause 3 seeks to provide an alternative route for appeals against decisions of the health committee.

Under the provisions of new clause 3, an appeal on either a matter of fact or of law would lie to an appeal tribunal. A further right of appeal against a decision of that tribunal on a point of law only would lie to Her Majesty in Council. That would be in line with the practice applying to the other health professionals.

The appeal tribunal would comprise a legally qualified chairman—a senior solicitor or barrister—a fully registered osteopath and a registered medical practitioner, all of whom would be appointed in accordance with rules drawn up by the general council and approved by the Privy

[Mr. Moss]

Council. In order to ensure the independence of the appeal tribunal from the general council, the rules must specifically prohibit the general council from selecting any member of the appeal tribunal.

A different appeal tribunal will be constituted for each appeal and, subject to any provisions made by the rules, would sit in Northern Ireland in cases where the appeal has been by an osteopath whose registered address is in Northern Ireland, in Scotland if his or her address is in Scotland, and in England or Wales in any other case. Subject again to any provision made by rules, the appeal tribunal will sit in public.

Hon. Members will no doubt have noticed that that is in contrast with the provisions of amendment No. 17, which I shall discuss later. We shall provide for hearings of the health committee to be held in private. That difference does not betray a contradiction in policy. In the first instance, an appeal under this new clause would have been initiated by the osteopath himself rather than by another party, as would be the case with the original allegation.

Also, the provisions have been drafted with an eye on the terms of article 6.1 of the European convention on human rights, which states:

"In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law."

The appeal to the appeal tribunal would be by way of a rehearing at which the general council would be the respondent. The appeal tribunal would possess the same powers as the health committee to require a witness to attend the hearing and give evidence or produce documents. Those powers would be backed up by the provisions of clause 31, making failure to comply a criminal offence.

The appeal tribunal would be empowered to make any decision that the health committee would have the power to make under clause 23. In the same way, the appeal tribunal would have comparable powers of interim suspension, as in relation to the health committee by virtue of clause 24(1)(b).

The other amendments in this group are the consequential amendments required to clauses 30, 31 and 35. In particular, they would provide for the rules to be prepared by the general council under this clause to be subject not only to approval by the Privy Council but to the negative parliamentary procedures. They also provide for the general council to be the respondent to any further appeal made to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on a point of law.

Such hearings would normally be adversarial. However, as currently drafted, the Bill provides only that the general council may appear as the respondent. It is now felt, however, that the general council should always be the respondent. By making the general council the respondent, the provisions in clause 30(8) relating to the apportioning of costs are not required. The general council would automatically be a party to the hearing and could therefore be liable to incur the costs of the parties.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I welcome the provisions that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has introduced, and I take his point in regard to the reluctance of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to be faced with complicated matters of medical fact in which it would not feel itself qualified to make a decision. Thus, it is correct to limit the right of appeal to the Judicial Committee to points of law. There are, however, one or two detailed matters in regard to new clause 3 to which I draw the attention of the House and in particular ask my hon. Friend to address to see whether further amendments could be made at a later stage of the Bill's process.

The first point that worries me is that the general council has virtually unfettered powers to make rules. Therefore, it is very difficult for the House to consider new clause 3 and to satisfy itself that the rules of justice—natural justice—will be fully carried out when the general council makes decisions over which it has no control.

I am happy that the appeal tribunal should be chaired by a lawyer. It is terribly important—I speak as somebody who practised at the Bar—that people with legal qualifications chair such committees. There is always a temptation to denigrate the legal profession and to underestimate the value of putting lawyers on lay tribunals on which their advice on what is fair, right and in accordance with the concepts of our law can be extremely useful.

I am pleased that the chairman is to be a lawyer, but I am a little less happy that the rules are so clear on what both the other members of the tribunal have to be. There has to be one osteopath, and one registered medical practitioner. It might be appropriate to have somebody with a different background, interest and knowledge on the appeal tribunal in circumstances which I cannot currently guess but which might arise.

My hon. Friend will take the point that the reason why he is leaving the rules so general for the committee to consider later is precisely that, and to fetter the committee in that way on that specific issue seems to be unwise and contrary to the general thinking behind the clause.

The second point, which is possibly more serious, is that new clause 3(4) states:

"The rules may, in particular, make similar provision to that made by virtue of section 26."

There are then many sub-paragraphs. In clause 26, the position is different. It deals with the setting up of the health committee and the rules that the health committee shall decide on. It states:

"The rules shall, in particular, include provision".

There we have the health committee being bound to make rules along the lines of that clause, but that compulsion is removed when it comes to the appeal committee, which has discretion whether to follow the rules laid down in clause 26.

What concerns me in particular is that clause 26(2)(d) states:

"The rules shall, in particular, include provision . . . entitling the osteopath to be legally represented at any hearing in respect of the allegation".

If I read that clause correctly—I stand to be corrected if somebody can so persuade me—what is substituted for that in new clause 3 is that the rules may, in particular, include a provision entitling the osteopath to be legally represented at any hearing. If that reading is correct, it would, at least in theory, enable the appeal tribunal to refuse legal representation to an osteopath who has appealed to it.

I cannot believe that that is the intention behind the drafting of the Bill, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would confirm that, if I am right, that point will be

rectified. It would be a most unfortunate lacuna if that went on to the statute book without its being intended to have the effect which I believe it has.

More generally, I very much welcome the setting up of the appeal tribunal. I am sure that it will be invaluable and I am particularly pleased that it is specifically set down that the appeal shall be by way of a rehearing of a case. Therefore, there can be no danger of an osteopath being fobbed off with an appeal that would be taken by way of written evidence, for example, or would look only at the evidence that had been presented to the original hearing. I am confident that the appeal tribunal will offer justice to osteopaths, with the provisions that I have already expressed as being my doubts about it.

I do not need to trouble the House any longer on the new clause, provided that my hon. Friend, who is now consulting his advisers, can satisfy me on those points.

Mr. Sackville: I formally signal the Government's support for the new clause and recognise the co-operation and support of the medical and legal professions, which have been extremely helpful in drawing up the new clause.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I give a warm welcome to the new clause and express my support for it. A rigorous procedure for the appeal system is essential especially as we are giving the osteopathic profession official status. It will certainly give confidence to patients to know that no stone will be left unturned in the system that will determine the fitness of osteopaths to return to the profession.

10 am

Mr. Moss: I should like to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). His first point was that the council could make its own rules. He felt that that was to give it perhaps a little too much licence. I remind him that any rules which the council may come up with will be subject to the approval of the Privy Council and, of course, as a result may be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

My hon. Friend referred to the composition of the tribunal. Taking first his point about the chair being a lawyer, I am glad that he declared an interest. But he seemed to speak most of the time about the interests of his profession. We believe that it is extremely important that a lawyer should chair the tribunal. We also believe that the inclusion of an osteopath and a medical adviser is vital. The osteopath could comment on professional matters of osteopathy and the running of the practice by the osteopath. The doctor could advise on health matters. Let us face it: the appeal will be to a health tribunal on health matters.

My hon. Friend raised the difference between the wording "may" and "shall" in terms of making the rules. The general council will be required to make rules and the Privy Council will scrutinise them. It is difficult to believe that the Privy Council would not take the important points that my hon. Friend raised into account. In no circumstances would it countenance an individual not having legal representation on any of the investigatory committees of tribunals.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 6

REGISTRATION: SUPPLEMENTAL PROVISION

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 24, at end insert '-(a)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 2, in page 5, line 25, at end insert 'and

(b) the address at which he has his practice or principal practice or, if he is not practising, such address as may be prescribed.

No. 3, in page 6, line 9, at end insert—

'(m) the meaning of "principal practice" for the purposes of subsection (1).

No. 29, in clause 39, page 28, line 20, leave out 'as his address'.

Mr. Moss: Amendment No. 1 will require the statutory register to show the osteopath's practice or principal practice address as well as the type of registration—full, conditional or provisional—that he or she holds. The register forms the heart of the statutory scheme. It will provide the assurance to members of the public that a practitioner whose name appears in the register has been appropriately trained, is properly qualified and is fully competent in the practice of osteopathy.

The provisions of clause 37 exempt osteopaths from the rehabilitation of offenders legislation, and place them under an obligation to declare all their criminal convictions, including spent convictions if asked, when applying for registration. So members of the public will be provided with an additional assurance as to a registered practitioner's bona fides and character.

The statutory register will elevate the scheme from the current system of voluntary registration. Voluntary registration has worked exceptionally well for the majority of practitioners. It has also played a key role in paving the way for statutory regulation. However, by its very nature, the voluntary system cannot enforce standards of competence or conduct. If a practitioner chooses not to participate in the scheme, the body that administers the scheme is completely powerless to exercise any jurisdiction over that individual's practice. That fundamental weakness brings into sharp focus the need for a statutory scheme.

As the law currently stands, anyone can call himself an osteopath and set up in practice. There is no obligation to undergo formal training of any nature or to comply with the standards of professional competence. Through the establishment of a statutory register maintained by a statutory council, standards of training, education, proficiency and professional conduct can be enforced throughout the profession in the United Kingdom. The statutory scheme will also require anyone who wishes to practise as an osteopath to conform to the standards set, to be registered on the statutory register and to submit himself to the authority of the statutory council.

Recording the address of a practising osteopath's practice or principal practice will not only provide members of the public with an essential piece of additional information—where to go for treatment—but will play a vital role in the election of members to the general council. The latter point will also apply to the address shown on the register for non-practising osteopaths. The precise detail is set out in the schedule which we shall examine later.

[Mr. Moss]

I draw the attention of hon. Members to paragraph 9 of the schedule. It specifies that eight of the osteopathic members of the general council are to be elected by fully registered osteopaths whose registered addresses are in England. Three others are to be elected by fully registered osteopaths with registered addresses in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—one from each of the three countries. The schedule also provides for a 12th member, who must be a registered medical practitioner at the time of his election, to be elected by fully registered osteopaths whose registered addresses are in the United Kingdom.

We spent some time thinking about the address that should appear on the register in the case of a non-practising osteopath. Our initial instinct was to select the osteopath's home address, which would have been defined more precisely in the rules. However, two examples came to mind to discount that option. The first was the case of a practitioner who might no longer be in current practice but was widely respected within the profession and had established a clinic, perhaps under his or her name, which attracted practitioners of the highest calibre and was held in the highest esteem by its clientele.

Although no longer in current practice, the practitioner might continue to hold the reins of the clinic and may be regarded as the driving force behind its success. Such a person would undoubtedly want the address shown in the register against his name to be that of the clinic rather than his home address, regardless of how "home" was described in the rules.

The second example raised arguably more serious anxieties. A practitioner might have received menacing threats sufficient to make him consider temporarily suspending practice or, even worse, to make him cease practising because the threats so affected him that he was no longer able to practice. The worst thing that such a person could face if he decided to withdraw from current practice would be the appearance of his home address in the register because he chose to maintain his registration.

I accept that the examples are fairly extreme. Setting them aside, it is likely that some osteopaths will wish to keep their professional and private lives separate and, for such reasons, will not want their home address to be shown on the register. For all those reasons, it is felt that the matter should be left to the rules. The rules could provide a list of different types of address which a non-practising osteopath could choose to be recorded on the register.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Clause 6 is the heart of the Bill because it establishes the register which distinguishes a professional osteopath from simply anyone who decides to use that term. Clause 6 is extremely important if the Bill is to get on to the statute book. Over the years and the generations, there has been considerable scepticism by the medical profession about osteopathy and practitioners of other forms of what is now called complementary or alternative medicine.

Before I came here to speak today, I took advice from a member of the medical profession for whose judgment I have the highest regard—my father. He tells me that, in 40 years of medical practice, he has never yet referred a patient to an osteopath. He has never yet come across a case in which he believed that the conventional medical disciplines of orthopaedics and physiotherapy were insufficient to deal with the complaints for which osteopaths believe that their talents make them exceptionally qualified. Nevertheless, my father, in common with many members of the medical profession, has an open mind and, what is more, he has no doubt as to the integrity of osteopaths. No doubt there are some bad apples in that profession, just as there are in any other profession or activity.

It can only contribute to the confidence of the public and that of the medical profession to advise people whether an osteopath might be able to contribute something to the treatment and cure of symptoms, if it is absolutely clear who is and who is not an osteopath. Such confidence will also be enhanced if everyone is clear about the definition of the word "osteopath". It is therefore essential that we have such a register.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on his success in steering the Bill through Committee. He has put a great deal of hard work and careful thought into the Bill, and I have considerable regard for his judgment. That encourages me to offer the Bill my general support.

If the general council is to have the responsibilities set out in clause 6 conferred on it, there should be no doubt about its proactive role. There should be no doubt about the precision and rigour with which the register will be drawn up and maintained. It is therefore important that the amendments proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), in particular amendment No. 2, which leave out "may" and inserts "shall"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. the hon. Gentleman is talking about amendment No. 48, which we have not yet reached. Amendment No. 2 refers to the address of an osteopath.

Mr. Davies: I hope that I will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we reach amendment No. 2.

If we are to have a register, a name and address must be provided. There should be no misunderstandings about that address and, therefore, the proposed amendments greatly contribute to the precision and the credibility of the Bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 5, line 25, at end insert 'and

(b) the address at which he has his practice or principal practice or, if he is not practising, such address as may be prescribed.'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I beg to move amendment No. 48, in page 5, line 26, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

I am grateful for all that my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said about the importance of the amendment. I stress, as my hon. Friend did, the importance to the Bill of the register and the concept of registration. My hon. Friend is right to say that they are central to the Bill.

It is also important to ensure that that registration process is open. There is no point in keeping a register if no one is clear about its purpose or the rules that guide its compilation. It is particularly important that people are aware of the rules that guide who may or may not be included on that register. It is for that reason that I have tabled the amendment, which would amend clause 6(2):

"The General Council may make rules in connection with registration and the register and as to the payment of fees"

to read: "The General Council shall" and so on.

I am particularly keen that the rules that apply to registration should be made clear to the public as well as to osteopaths, so that a proper assessment can be made of the value of that registration. If, for example, the general council decided, in its wisdom, not to make rules in connection with some of the matters set out in clause 6(3), the value of the registration would be greatly diminished.

The registration procedure will cover a number of matters. For example, clause 6(3)(e) states that the general council may make rules about

"the manner in which the Registrar is to satisfy himself as to the physical and mental health of any person applying for registration and the procedure for so doing".

Clause 6(3)(d) provides that the general council may make rules about

"the manner in which the Registrar is to satisfy himself as to the good character and competence of any person applying for registration and the procedure for so doing".

Unless people can be satisfied that the registrar has made a proper decision and explored fully the facts behind it, the value of the register will be low.

10.15 am

I am not happy that the general council's ability to make a discretionary ruling as to what is and what is not to be disclosed should be left unfettered. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) can tell me whether it is proposed that the rules that govern the establishment of the register and its contents will be made public. I am concerned about the use of the word "may", because, as I read it, it is possible under the Bill for those rules to be unrecorded and undisclosed.

I hope that the general council will have to make rules that set out clearly the background against which the register has been compiled. I hope that it will also set out clearly the criteria that will be taken into account by the registrar when he sets up the register. The register should be available to anyone who wishes to read it, so that he is clear as to its value. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East will be able to assure me on those issues.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I have already paid the compliment to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) of approving his amendment, even before he had a chance to move it. My hon. Friend has made the essential argument in favour of it, and there is not much that I need to say in support.

When we legislate to give a professional body the power to make rules, it is unsatisfactory if we do not stipulate that that body has the responsibility to make those rules and that, therefore, it must make the appropriate rules. Otherwise, we take away with one hand the responsibility that we have appeared to confer with the other. I set some store by my hon. Friend's amendment, and I agree with what he said about tightening the terms of this crucial clause.

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) may be aware that at least two similar amendments were considered in Committee. My fundamental reason for resisting my hon. Friend's amendment is the same as that which I gave in Committee. Such an amendment would deprive the general council of the responsibility of exercising its own judgment on important matters—for example, the rules connected with registration and the payment of fees.

The Bill is founded on the principle of self-regulation, and it should not render the general council impotent in determining policy and priorities by inflexibly prescribing all its functions in legislation. That would reduce the status of the general council to that of purely an administrative body. The purpose of the Bill is to provide the profession with the statutory framework to enable it to regulate its own activities and chart its future development and growth.

It is worth remembering that the profession itself is seeking the measure. The proposed scheme of statutory regulation will replace the current system of voluntary registration. It is doing so not because, under the voluntary schemes, the profession has failed satisfactorily to register its affairs, but to give it the authority to do more effectively what it has been doing successfully for almost 60 years. Half the members of the general council will be specifically serving the interest of the profession.

Therefore, there is absolutely no basis on which to think that the general council would not make sensible decisions on matters of registration, the payment of fees or other key issues. Furthermore, there is no basis for assuming that such decisions would be detrimental to practitioners. If the profession had any expectation of operating anything but a fair scheme, it would not seek statutory regulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster asked whether the rules would be made public. I am most happy to confirm that they will.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's assurance, as the issue of the rules being made public is important for the transparency and the public confidence needed if the new system, envisaged in the Bill, is to work. However, if my hon. Friend can give that clear assurance, why is it not written on the face of the Bill?

Mr. Moss: I was about to come to that matter.

The profession is also looking to submit itself to the authority of the Privy Council. If the Privy Council felt that the general council was failing to perform a function that it should perform, it would be able to intervene and direct the general council as appropriate. In extreme cases, the Privy Council could step in and take over the general council's responsibilities. Since the profession, through the legislation, is placing itself under the scrutiny of the Privy Council, that council will show the way in which matters are proceeding in the public interest by making a statutory instrument which is in the public domain.

The Bill already provides the necessary safeguards against the concerns of my hon. Friends. It also entrusts to the general council the ability to exercise its judgment in fulfilling its statutory duty to regulate the osteopathic profession.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I must confess that my hon. Friend has not wholly satisfied me on why the Bill contains a great divide between what the general council "shall" do—which applies to about half the provisions—and what the general council "may" do—which applies to the other provisions. I am puzzled over the positioning of the dividing line between discretion and ruling. However, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving his assurance about the openness of the rules that lie behind regulation. Therefore, in the light of what my hon. Friend has said, I seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 6

REGISTRATION: SUPPLEMENTAL PROVISION

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 6, line 9, at end insert—'(m) the meaning of "principal practice" for the purposes of subsection (1).'—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 8

RESTORATION TO THE REGISTER OF OSTEOPATHS WHO HAVE BEEN STRUCK OFF

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 7, line 19, leave out 'any' and insert 'an'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 14, in clause 14, page 11, line 16, leave out 'reaching' and insert 'having reached'.

No. 16, in clause 23, page 19, line 26 leave out 'or (5)' and insert '(5) or (6)'.

No. 26, in clause 33, page 25, line 36, leave out 'consider' and insert 'considers'.

No. 27, in page 25, line 39, leave out 'themselves' and insert 'itself'.

Mr. Moss: The group of what might first appear to be small drafting amendments contains two matters of substance. Amendment No. 4 is a simple drafting amendment, but amendment No. 14 will ensure that the same criteria would be applied for the recognition of non-United Kingdom qualifications, other than those covered by Community law, as will be used for the recognition of United Kingdom qualifications.

Similar amendments were made in Committee in respect of United Kingdom qualifications, but it seems that this one slipped through the net. The House has already heard that the registration system proposed in the Bill will ultimately centre on whether or not a practitioner holds a recognised qualification, which equips him or her with the education, training and skills required for the safe and competent practice of osteopathy.

Clause 14 provides the mechanism for recognising the qualifications that meet that standard. Provision is made in clause 16 for withdrawing recognition if that standard is no longer met or the institution involved fails to comply with the conditions attached to the continued recognition of its qualifications. I shall say more about the conditions later.

In Committee, I described how the wording "evidence of reaching the required standard of proficiency" was a little too tight, as it demanded that a qualification would have to hit the mark when the application for recognition was being considered. It did not enable a qualification that had previously been met and was meeting the required standard when it was awarded to the osteopath to be recognised if it no longer met the standard or was, perhaps, no longer being awarded. The amendment will extend the same flexibility as is now provided for United Kingdom qualifications to non-United Kingdom qualifications.

Decisions on whether a qualification provides evidence that someone had reached the required standard of proficiency laid down by the general council under clause 13 for the safe and competent practice of ostoepaths—and so should be recognised for the purposes of registration—will initially be made by the education committee. If it is satisfied that the qualification provides such evidence, it will recommend to the general council that the qualification should be a recognised qualification.

In keeping with the practice adopted by schemes governing other health care professions that operate a similar system of recognition, the general council will seek the approval of the Privy Council for the qualification to be recognised. To assist the education committee in that task, clause 12 enables the committee to appoint visitors, who are almost certain to constitute the principal means by which the education committee obtains information on the nature and quality of instruction given by an institution. In turn, that will provide the basis on which the committee can recommend to the general council whether a qualification should be recognised.

While it is envisaged that judgment on the adequacy of overseas qualifications would normally be made on the basis of information supplied by the institution rather than by means of an overseas visit, clause 12 was amended in Committee to remove the previous limitation restricting the scope of those visits to those institutions in the United Kingdom.

Amendment No. 16 provides an osteopath making an application to the health committee for a conditions of practice or suspension order, made under clause 23, to be reviewed, with the right to a hearing. As we have already discussed this morning, the health committee will form an important part of the statutory scheme's fitness-to-practise machinery. Its function is to investigate allegations made against an osteopath that his or her ability to practise is seriously impaired because of physical or mental health and consequently poses a threat to the safety and well-being of his or her patients.

Unlike its sister committee, the professional conduct committee, the health committee's role is not disciplinary. Instead, it ensures that proper and adequate safeguards are provided for patients. For that reason, the health committee will be required to ensure that any action that it takes in terms of suspending an osteopath's registration or imposing conditions on his or her continued practice has to be proportional to the risk that he or she is considered to represent to his or her patients. As the committee's function is not disciplinary, it will have no powers of erasure.

The Bill also makes provision to ensure that the osteopath is provided with the full details of the allegation made against him or her and given the opportunity to state his or her case at a hearing at which he or her—sorry, he or she—may be legally represented if he or she should so chooses. I think that I shall just stick to "he" as it will be more simple—although I may be picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend will note that, despite the best efforts of the feminists, "he" still includes "she" for the purposes of legal definition.

Mr. Moss: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his direction.

Lady Olga Maitland: May I reassure my hon. Friend that I have no feminist angst about the use of "he" or "she"? I do not believe in butchering the English language, and think that it is appropriate at times to use the generic term. "He" will suffice very nicely here.

Mr. Moss: The Bill also makes provision to ensure that the osteopath is provided with full details of the allegation against him and is given an opportunity to state his case at a hearing, at which he may be legally represented if he so chooses, as well as the right of appeal to the appeal tribunal against decisions of the health committee. The Bill also provides an opportunity for the osteopath to make an application to the health committee once a year for the order made against him to be reviewed. As drafted, the Bill does not provide the osteopath with an opportunity to put his case at a hearing before the health committee comes to a decision on such an application.

10.30 am

It has never been our intention to deprive the osteopath of this opportunity. Such an intention would run contrary to the spirit of natural justice, one of the key principles on which the scheme is to be founded. The amendment therefore extends the practitioner' rights to a hearing to include such applications, thereby ensuring that the workings of the health committee will be open and fair, in theory and in practice.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject, will he give the House some examples of the sort of offences for which he considers removal from the register appropriate? Does he believe that it is the likely intention of the council—I say "likely", because it does not yet exist—to incorporate the sort of moral and non-clinical offences that the BMA has in the past considered grounds for disbarring doctors?

Mr. Moss: We are talking about the health committee at the moment. I have already said that it is not a disciplinary body—it has no powers of erasure from the register. The other "fitness to practise" committees, particularly the professional conduct committee, have powers to erase from the register if, at a hearing, an osteopath is found to have broken the rules. He can therefore be removed from the register. He can reapply at some stage in the future, but conditions may be set governing the standards of proficiency that he needs to meet to re-enter the register.

Amendments Nos. 26 and 27 provide me with an opportunity to remind the House of the important role that the Privy Council will play in the operation of the statutory scheme. In keeping with the other statutory schemes governing health professions, the work of the General Osteopathic Council and its four statutory committees will be overseen by the Privy Council. One of the Privy Council's key functions will be to approve the rules drawn up by the general council.

These rules will cover the entire range of the general council's responsibilities, including registration, post-registration training and the procedural rules of the four statutory committees. When we come to look at the schedule, especially the provisions for establishing the first General Osteopathic Council, we shall see other ways in which the Privy Council will be involved in the scheme.

Clause 33 provides for the Privy Council to be granted default powers to enable it to direct the General Osteopathic Council to perform any function under the Act that the Privy Council considers the general council should have done but has failed to do. If the general council refused to respond to this direction, the Privy Council would be empowered to step in and take over the functions of the general council and do anything that the latter could have done under the Act.

The Privy Council possesses default powers similar to those under the statutory schemes of other health professions. To set these key provisions in context, I should add that there are no known cases of the Privy Council having had to exercise its default powers in relation to a statutory scheme. Although the osteopaths can take pride in being first in respect of a number of new ideas in the area of statutory regulation, I am confident that this is one first which they have no intention of trying to achieve.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I do not intend to enter the discussion of "he" and "she". I am happy to accept the learned definition offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). I have always believed that "she who must be obeyed" goes back to Rider Haggard, reiterated by Bernard Shaw in "Getting Married"—but for today we will stick to the legal definition.

I want to ask for some reassurance and, I hope, support from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss). Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), I have no parental examples to offer, but some of my constituents are training to become osteopaths, and they have asked me about the recognition of qualifications with particular reference to training grants.

The British School of Osteopathy, which I imagine offers the sort of qualifications to which the amendments refer, attracts students from around the country. Those students receive grants from local education authorities, but not full grants. The fees alone are about £5,000, but my constituents get grants of between £600 and £700, leaving them a great deal of money to find so that they can qualify and met the high standards which the Bill rightly seeks to establish.

I hope that my hon. Friend has managed to obtain reassurances from the Government on this score. The issue partly comes under the responsibilities of the Department for Education and certain other Departments of State. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in pressing for recognition of such qualifications for eligibility for full and mandatory grants. I hope that these courses will be recognised under the new law and that mandatory awards will be given for them.

Lady Olga Maitland: I support this group of amendments and I wish to draw attention to the importance of ensuring that overseas applicants to join the osteopathic profession maintain our standards of professionalism. It has become abundantly evident that there is a wide variation in training standards. A properly qualified osteopath has to undergo four years' training, which hardly compares with the gentleman who decides to set himself up with no experience but with a sign outside the door. We do not want to return to the days when a dentist's sole claim to expertise rested on the fact that he pulled teeth.

Professional standards are important. Those with overseas experience may well reach our standards, but we need to be certain that they conform to the rigorous criteria to be imposed by the newly formed osteopathic governing bodies.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). I myself tabled an amendment which was not selected but which had to do with practitioners' ability to speak our native language. *[Interruption.]* I hear some tut-tutting from the Labour Front Bench. It is astonishing that the Labour party should wish to put into our medical profession people who cannot communicate properly with our patients. It is amazing that such crass stupidity can form part of Labour party policy——

Ms Primarolo: If the hon. Gentleman has read the Bill he will know that it contains regulations and conditions which apply to osteopaths the same standards of education and training as are applied to all the medical professions in this country. So his comments about communicating in the same language are misplaced and irrelevant to the debate. That is why I tut-tutted.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am sorry that I gave way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's amendment was ruled out of order, so he cannot now speak to it.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I would not dream of speaking to my amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely enlarging on my hon. Friend's remarks about practitioners' general qualifications. And it is certainly a matter of great concern that many people who practise medicine in this country cannot communicate with their patients. The Government should turn their attention to that.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that fluent English is vital for the successful outcome of treatment and that misunderstandings often arise because of poor communication between practitioner and patient?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I whole-heartedly agree. No one can prescribe the right treatment if he cannot understand what the patient is telling him about his ailment. As my hon. Friend says, it is regrettable that all too often that is the case. I hope that the Bill will contain some provision to control standards of education in the profession.

Unless I have misunderstood the Bill, the method of getting to a disciplinary hearing seems rather clumsy. Clause 23 says that the health committee shall take certain action on allegations referred to it under section 20. Section 20 sets out the allegations which will lead to disciplinary action by the general council. It states:

"This section applies where any allegation is made against a registered osteopath to the effect that—

(a) he has been guilty of conduct which falls short of the standard required by a registered osteopath;

(b) he has been guilty of professional incompetence;

(c) he has been convicted (at any time) in the United Kingdom of a criminal offence".

I am glad to say that elsewhere in the Bill that is limited to a relevant criminal offence.

A complaint under those headings may be made not to the investigations committee or to the professional conduct committee, but to the health committee. According to clause 23, the health committee can then take certain actions including the possible suspension of the osteopath, and I presume that it would then refer the matter to the investigations committee or the professional conduct committee for action. I am puzzled about why such a roundabout route should be adopted and why allegations under section 20 should not be made directly to those who will deal with them.

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) asked about student funding. I understand that in the past the profession made continuous representations about the sort of student funding that my hon. Friend mentions. Unfortunately, to date the answer has been a firm no. However, more recent approaches have elicited a different response and the profession has been told that if it regulates itself under some sort of statutory regime its request will be viewed more favourably.

The osteopaths have organised and pressed for a statutory regulation system. I wish them every success, when that has been achieved, in approaching the Department for proper funding for students, many of whom follow four-year degree courses. One of the colleges was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, but there are others. The level of qualification is high and every encouragement should be given by the system to enable more and more students to qualify at the highest level.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) spoke about the tortuous route for complaints. Allegations about health matters can be made by patients or by a fellow professional. The personal problem of the osteopath's health may have a bearing on whether he can carry out his job to the required level.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Section 20 lists other less personal and perhaps equally significant matters which bear on whether the osteopath can properly practise. A conviction for a criminal offence is mentioned, and I do not see why that should go through the health committee.

10.45 am

Mr. Moss: I do not think that it does. Clause 20 requires only allegations about an osteopath's health to be referred to the health committee. Other allegations will not be directed along that route. The investigations committee acts to ensure that there is a case to answer and that the health committee is not being asked to look at cases that are outside its powers.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9

ACCESS TO THE REGISTER ETC

Mr. Moss: I beg to move, amendment No. 5, in page 7, line 36, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'(2) Any person who asks the General Council for a copy of the most recently published register shall be entitled to have one on payment of such reasonable fee as the Council may determine.

(2A) Subsection (2) shall not be taken as preventing the General Council from providing copies of the register free of charge whenever it considers it appropriate.'.

The amendment will enable the general council to make copies of the register available free of charge when it considers that appropriate. Although the existing wording of the clause might have been sufficient to enable the general council to do that, some doubt may have existed because of an amendment in Committee to clause 19 which concerns the code of practice that the general council will be required to prepare and publish. That amendment was made specifically to ensure that the general council could provide copies of the code free of charge.

Taking one's own Bill through Parliament certainly opens one's eyes to the finer points of legislation and especially to the nuances of drafting. Because the Bill is

now quite specific in enabling the general council to make the code of practice available free of charge, it could have been argued that because the subsection on the register was not as clear as intended it would not give the general council the same freedom in respect of the register. That is certainly not our intention. I made it clear during the clause stand part debate in Committee that the intention was for the general council to have this discretion. I said that the clause imposed a duty on the general council to publish a copy of the register annually and to make copies available for sale or distribution free of charge as it thinks fit.

The amendment removes any doubt and will give to the general council the statutory freedom that had always been intended.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 10

FRAUD OR ERROR IN RELATION TO REGISTRATION

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 8, line 6, leave out from 'The' to 'at', in line 12, and insert—

'Registrar shall investigate any allegation that an entry in the register has been fraudulently procured or incorrectly made and report on the result of his investigation to the General Council.

(1A) An entry which has been restored to the register under section 6(5) or 8, or under rules made by virtue of section 8(8), may be treated for the purposes of this section as having been fraudulently procured or incorrectly made if any previous entry from which the restored entry is derived was fraudulently procured or incorrectly made.

(2) The Registrar may'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider the following amendments: No. 7, in page 8, line 13, leave out 'to'.

No. 8, in page 8, line 16, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 and insert—

The General Council shall by rules make provision, in relation to any case where the Registrar proposes to suspend an osteopath's registration under subsection (2)—'.

No. 9, in page 8, line 23, leave out 'on the matter'.

No. 10, in page 8, line 24, leave out

'an entry in the register'

and insert 'the entry in question'.

No. 11, in page 8, line 38, leave out 'may appear as' and insert 'shall be'.

No. 12, in page 9, line 3, leave out subsection (11).

No. 13, in page 9, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) The General Council may by rules make such further provision as it considers appropriate with respect to suspensions under subsection (2), including in particular provision as to their duration.'.

Mr. Moss: The amendments seek to streamline the provisions of clause 10. They will do that by giving the registrar the direct power and responsibility to investigate an allegation that an entry in the register has been incorrectly made or fraudulently obtained. As drafted, the Bill provides for such power and responsiblity to be conferred on the general council, with an ability for the council to make laws for these to be exercised by the registrar.

This is an important change, but it is consistent with other themes in the Bill. For example, it will be the registrar who will be charged under clause 2 with the statutory duty of establishing and maintaining the register of osteopaths. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable for the registrar to be able to initiate action to be satisfied about the correctness of the entries in the register. The amendments will achieve that purpose.

The resulting change should also mean that any investigation will be carried out far more speedily, as the registrar will be able to carry out an immediate investigation into such an allegation without having to wait for the general council to meet and consider the matter first. That would avoid any unnecessary delay which might have arisen if the general council's periodic meetings turn out to be fairly infrequent.

When the registrar has completed his investigation, he is to report on the matter to the general council. If, having considered the registrar's report, the general council is satisfied that the entry in question has been incorrectly made or fraudulently obtained, it may order the registrar to remove it. The osteopath would have a right of appeal against that decision to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

As part of the package, the registrar would have the authority to order the immediate suspension of an osteopath's registration, pending investigation, where he is satisfied that such action is necessary to protect members of the public. That would place the registrar of the General Osteopathic Council in a unique position vis-a-vis the registrars of similar schemes for health care professionals.

The House will see, however, that the registrar is not given a completely free hand to cut a swathe through the names of the osteopaths appearing in the register. He will be permitted to take that action only when he is satisfied that it is justified in terms of protecting the public. His powers will also be contained within the limits prescribed by the rules to ensure that, in instances where he proposes to exercise his powers—which must, by definition, be before he imposes such an order—the practitioner in question will be given an opportunity to appear in front of the investigating committee supported by legal representation, if he so chooses, to argue his case against suspension.

That is an important provision. In ensuring that the statutory scheme provides protection for the public, it is also important to ensure that the human rights of the osteopath are protected. In that way, the public and the profession will be able to have the utmost confidence in the scheme.

It may at first sight seem a little odd for the practitioners' objections to the making of a suspension order to be heard by the investigating committee. The reason for this decision is that the investigating committee will already have in place the machinery, set out in clause 21, to hold such hearings. The registrar is required to report the outcome of his investigations to the general council. If, having considered his report, the general council is satisfied that any entry in the register has been incorrectly made or fraudulently obtained, it may order the registrar to remove it.

The osteopath has a right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council against a decision to remove his name from the register. Such hearings would normally be adversarial. As drafted, the Bill provides only that the general council may appear as respondent. In keeping with what I said earlier, we now feel that the general council ought always to be the respondent, if only for this simple reason: if it is not, who is?

By making the general council a respondent, the provisions in clause 10(11) relating to the apportioning of costs are not required. The general council would

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automatically be a party to the hearing and could, therefore, be liable to incur the costs of the parties. The amendments, and the clause, further strengthen the status of the statutory register. The provisions also ensure that they apply to an entry that has been restored to the register by virtue of clause 6(5)—which enables an osteopath who has failed to renew his registration under clause 8, which deals with the registering of an osteopath who has been struck off—if the original entry was incorrectly made or fraudulently obtained.

Lady Olga Maitland: I support the amendments. It is important that the public have a right to be protected from fraudulent entries that have got on to the register. It is also important that we should take into account all the different kinds of abuses of the profession that might be perpetrated. I take it that this refers to criminal offences, to fraud and to the breakdown of discipline between the osteopath and the patient, particularly when that discipline is a matter of trust and that trust has been abused, especially through very personal relationships. When all those factors are taken into account, and we bear in mind the worthless qualifications that can be used, it is essential that the House should agree to the amendments.

Mr. Bowis: The amendments incoprporate the Upminster doctrine by removing a "may" and inserting a "shall". No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) will welcome that. I am sure that he is right in that case. I am equally certain that the amendment, which tightens that process up, is correct. If we are to have a properly regulated profession, there must be no question of anyone being able fraudulently to get on to the list, which the public ought to come to trust. That is particularly the case if the fraud applies to any claims of professional qualifications, quite apart from any criminal offences that are deemed to be relevant.

However, I seek the reassurance of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on the other side of the coin. It is possible that the clause will provide opportunities for those who have professional jealousies to make frivolous or mischievous claims against a properly qualified person. I am sure that the procedures will ensure that such claims are dismissed, but I seek my hon. Friend's assurance that speed will be of the essence, because somebody's career and professional standing could be at risk if such a claim were made against him by a professional rival.

The clause does not contain a speed element. I hope that there will be a quick look at each case by the registrar to see whether it should be considered further—a sort of procurator fiscal look at the case. If there is a case to be answered, it should be investigated fully and properly. However, that initial speed is necessary.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I have some doubts about the circumstances in which the registrar would intervene, as set out in the clause and the amendments to it. Some of the circumstances are defined in clause 20, which speaks of

"conduct which falls short of the standard required of a registered osteopath".

However, as far as I can see from reading through the Bill, such conduct is nowhere defined. In other words, there is an extraordinarily wide area in which the registrar could say that the osteopath had been guilty of conduct falling below the required standard. Could my hon. Friend give us some illustrations as to what conduct that might be? For example, would it include allegations about drunkenness or sexual misconduct? What does my hon. Friend envisage are standards of conduct, not involving a relevant criminal offence, that would require a registrar to suspend an osteopath?

Mr. Moss: The comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) go to the heart of the amendments. We have tabled them in an attempt to streamline the process set out in clause 10. He may feel that, because we have not set a time limit in law, we have not gone far enough, but I assure him that the purpose of the amendments is to make sure that any allegation of the kind that he talked about, certainly those involving an entry on the register, can be picked up immediately by the registrar and acted on, rather than those involved having to wait, perhaps for a meeting of the general council to come round, before the process of investigation can be activated. We put the registrar at the heart of the preliminary look at what is, after all, a key element of the Bill—the accuracy of the entry in the register.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I take my hon. Friend's point about the investigation by the registrar and about increasing the speed with which such allegations can be dealt with. I welcome the change that the amendment will make. However, will he readdress the question that I put to him a little earlier about the health committee? I have now read clause 20 carefully. Nothing in it suggests that only serious impairment of the ability to practise as an osteopath because of a physical and mental condition should lead to a referral to the health committee. Anything under section 20 can be referred to the health committee and that goes against the desire to speed up investigations.

Mr. Moss: I shall first answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), who asked about misconduct that would necessarily result in referral to one of the committees. We are dealing with amendments to clause 10, which relates only to entries fraudulently obtained and not to disciplinary offences, which come under clause 20, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) referred. Clause 20(12) says:

"Where the Investigating Committee concludes that there is a case to answer, it shall . . .

(b) refer the allegation as formulated by the investigating Committee—

(i) to the Health Committee, in the case of an allegation of a kind mentioned in subsection (1)(d)".

Therefore, it is extremely specific on what can be referred to the health committee.

11 am

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Unless I have grossly mistaken the position, there is nothing in clause 20 to prevent a person from making an allegation directly to the health committee. I do not think that the clause relates only to matters that have already been before the investigating committee. As I read it, it is for the health committee to decide whether to refer a case to the investigating committee, not vice versa. Subsection (3) states:

"Where an allegation is made to the General Council, or to any of its committees (other than the Investigating Committee), it shall be the duty of the . . . committee to refer the allegation to the Investigating Committee."

The clause to which my hon. Friend referred in fact relates to what happens at a later stage, when the investigating committee has a matter referred to it by the health committee.

Mr. Moss: I take my hon. Friend's point. Initially, a case would be refered to the investigating committee, which would then decide under clause 20(12)(b)(i) whether it is a matter specific to the health committee under clause 20(1)(d). If it is, it will send the case to the health committee for further inquiry.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I want to challenge the interpretation that my hon. Friend put on my last question to him. He said that clause 10 provides for the registrar to suspend an osteopath if evidence is produced showing that a registration has been fraudulently procured or incorrectly made. Subsection (2) provides for the registrar "to have power, at any time during his investigation, to suspend the registration in question if he is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in order to protect members of the public." The registrar will have wide powers. If it were alleged that a registration was improperly made, he would have the power to anticipate the decision of the general council or its committees and suspend that registration.

Does the registrar have to give specific grounds for such a suspension? Does he have to define in what way he feels the public are endangered? From my reading of the clause, that does not appear to be the case. Should he incorrectly suspend an osteopath and subsequently discover that the registration was valid, and therefore the suspension should not have been made, is there any provision for compensation for the osteopath concerned? After all, he could have lost considerable revenue during his suspension, which was based on a mistaken decision by the registrar.

Mr. Moss: The title of clause 10 refers to "Fraud or error in relation to registration." Although subsection (2) provides the registrar with power to suspend, he would not do that unless there were very strong grounds for suspecting that there had been a fraudulent entry.

There is no provision for compensation, but there are many checks and balances in the Bill to ensure that accusations filter through the system in a way that gives the osteopath every opportunity to make his case. Of course, very often he is backed by legal advice.

Mr. Quentin Davies: My hon. Friend says—and I have no reason to doubt him—that the registrar would be extremely careful before using the powers under the clause. However, subsection (2) is so widely drawn that we have to place confidence in the good sense and integrity of the registrar. His powers are not limited during the investigation. He could take a purely arbitrary decsion to suspend if he so wished.

Mr. Moss: I have nothing further to add to that point.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am sorry to pester my hon. Friend, but it is important to clarify the issues surrounding clauses 20 and 23. We need to be absolutely clear about what clause 23 means; I do not think that that is clear at the moment. It would make the meaning absolutely clear if subsection (1), line 2, were amended to read "under section 20(12)". That would make the position what my hon. Friend has stated it to be, rather than as I originally perceived it to be.

The provisions of clause 23 would then apply only to any matters referred to the health committee by the investigating committee, rather than the alternative interpretation which currently could be thought to mean that any allegation under clause 20(1) should be dealt with by the health committee.

I do not ask my hon. Friend for an immediate answer to my suggestion, but I should be grateful if he would consider it.

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said that clause 10(2) provided wide-ranging powers for the registrar. However, subsection (3) makes provision for the osteopath to appear before the investigating committee to state his case before an order is made.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 8, line 13, leave out 'to'.

No. 8, in page 8, line 16, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 and insert—

'( ) The General Council shall by rules make provision, in relation to any case where the Registrar proposes to suspend an osteopath's registration under subsection (2)—'.

No. 9, in page 8, line 23, leave out 'on the matter'.

No. 10, in page 8, line 24, leave out 'an entry in the register' and insert 'the entry in question'.

No. 11, in page 8, line 38, leave out 'may appear as' and insert 'shall be'.

No. 12, in page 9, line 3, leave out subsection (11).

No. 13, in page 9, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) The General Council may by rules make such further provision as it considers appropriate with respect to suspensions under subsection (2), including in particular provision as to their duration.'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 14

Recognition of qualification

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 11, line 16, leave out 'reaching' and insert 'having reached'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 15

Recognition of qualifications: supplemental

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 15, in page 12, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) The General Council shall not exercise any of its functions under subsection (4) or (5) without the approval of the Privy Council.'.

The purpose of the amendment is to provide that the general council can exercise its powers to impose or remove conditions on the continued recognition of a qualification, with the approval of the Privy Council. The ability to impose conditions on the continued recognition of a qualification will be one of the tools in the general council's kitbag to ensure that high standards of education are achieved and maintained.

The sort of conditions that the general council could apply will be wide and varied, for example, when a new course is getting off the ground. One of the amendments made in Committee to clause 14 gives the general council, with the approval of the Privy Council, the ability to recognise a qualification prospectively. That would be on the basis that the information available at the time to the

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education committee and the general council was sufficient to demonstrate that when the qualification was eventually awarded, it would reach a standard of proficiency required by the general council for the safe and competent practice of osteopathy.

That was an important amendment to make, because before it was incorporated into the Bill only qualifications presented to the general council could be considered for recognition. In the case of a new course, there would have been no qualification until the first cohort of students had graduated. However, unless there were the certainty that the qualification would be recognised, it is doubtful whether anyone would enrol for the course.

Granting recognition to an as yet non-existent qualification on the basis that when it eventually came to be awarded there was likely to be evidence of it having reached the desired standard could be regarded by some as akin to signing a blank cheque. Although the general council would be able to initiate action to withdraw recognition once the qualification was awarded, that would be an extreme step taken too late to help students. The ability to impose conditions covers that middle ground. The amended provisions mean that the education committee can check that the course is developing as planned and provide it with the necessary levers to encourage the institution concerned to take remedial action if things go awry.

However, it will not be only in the case of new qualifications that the general council will be likely to want to impose conditions. Indeed, there may be general standards that the general council will wish to apply to the continued recognition of all recognised qualifications. These might include the ability of the education committee to appoint external examiners, to participate in the final clinical examinations or to require an institution to provide the education committee with, say, an annual report.

The ability to impose conditions will provide the education committee with very powerful levers to ensure that high standards of education are achieved and maintained. Failure to comply would be sufficient for the education committee and the general council to begin taking steps to withdraw recognition from the qualification.

Clause 15 requires that any conditions are to be imposed at the time that a qualification is granted recognition and for the institution concerned to be notified of their imposition as soon as possible. This, therefore, makes them part and parcel of the recognition process. Given that clause 14 provides for the recognition of a qualification to require the approval of the Privy Council, it would seem appropriate that any conditions imposed under clause 15 should similarly be subject to the Privy Council's approval. That is what the amendment will achieve. It will also place the general council's power under subsection (5) to remove conditions under the same regime.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The recognition of qualifications is crucial to the credibility of the register and, therefore, of the osteopathic profession. My hon. Friend mentioned a number of issues that arise in this context, including the prospective recognition of such qualifications which it seems to be necessary to accommodate, for the reasons that he mentioned. However, may I ask my hon. Friend to explain the international context of the amendment.

Under freedom of establishment, would osteopaths from the continent be able to establish themselves here? Is it envisaged that the education committee would recognise continental qualifications and thereby allow those who have graduated in osteopathy in continental centres of education and who call themselves osteopaths to be part of the register in this country, whether they practise here or on the continent, and to use their presence on the register and the recognition of their qualifications by the general council as the basis for the professional credibility as osteopaths elsewhere in the European Community? This is an important dimension to the issue of recognition of qualifications which is not dealt with specifically on the face of the Bill or in my hon. Friend's amendments to the clause. It ought to be dealt with before the House allows the Bill to proceed.

Mr. Sackville: The Government support the amendment. The use of a recognised qualification as providing the principal means whereby practitioners are entitled to be registered is a key feature of all other health care statutory schemes. Just as entry on to the register will be the prize sought by practitioners, obtaining recognition of their qualification will be the accolade sought by education institutions. It will be a key factor in determining the reputation of the institution. It will be the principal means by which it will be able to attract students and help to ensure its future viability. Simply put, it will make or break an institution. It is therefore vital that the institutions concerned can be assured of the fairness by which the system of recognition will operate.

When my hon. Friend described the process at Second Reading, he emphasised that the requirement on the general council to secure the approval of the Privy Council before a qualification is afforded recognition would ensure that all such decisions would be impartial, but the provisions for fair play in the Bill go beyond that. Under clause 14, the general council would be required to maintain and publish a list of the recognised qualifications. That will provide an open system and will enable one institution to compare its standards with another.

Clause 14 also provides for the general council to require the education committee to publish a statement on the criteria that it will use when advising the general council on whether a qualification should be recognised. That will provide education institutions with a level playing field and ensure that they are fully aware of the standards for which they must aim.

Clause 15 would place the general council under an obligation to notify an institution of the outcome of its application to have its qualification recognised as quickly as possible. It would also require the general council to give full reasons for its decision, in cases where it decided not to grant recognition.

These assurances could, however, be weakened if the general council's ability to impose conditions on the continued recognition of a qualification remained unchecked. Institutions may be alarmed at the admittedly extreme prospect of having burdensome conditions imposed, or of their being perversely applied in cases where the general council did not want to grant

recognition but could find no reason for not doing so, in order to use them as the means by which to seek to withdraw recognition on the ground of failure to comply.

The amendment would remove any such anxieties. Collectively, the provisions for recognising qualifications will give the firm foundation on which the osteopath scheme will be built and will provide the necessary building blocks to ensure that, in future, osteopaths are fully trained and properly qualified to practise osteopathy. For all those reasons, the Government support the amendment.

11.15 am

Lady Olga Maitland: I support the amendment. It is vital that the general council should ensure the highest standards of training. It is important to ensure that a battleground does not develop between the general council and the institutions. I hope that the institutions will develop training programmes of such quality that by the time their students graduate, they will have achieved the rigorous standards demanded by the general council.

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) asked about European Community regulations and laws. If he refers to page 12, he will see that subsections (10) and (11) of clause 14 deal with that matter.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 22

Consideration of allegations by the Professional Conduct Committee

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 59, in page 17, line 24, after 'section', insert

'or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 60, in page 17, line 39, after 'section', insert

'or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

No. 61, in page 18, line 42, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c).'

No. 62, in clause 23, page 19, line 2, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

No. 63, in clause 23 page 19, line 12, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

Mr. Moss: Clauses 22 and 23 empower the professional conduct committee and the health committee to make a conditions of practise order, or a suspension order in cases where they consider that an allegation made against an osteopath to be well founded. They also enable each committee to review an order while it is still current and to consider whether it should be renewed or, within certain limits, replaced by a different order, or otherwise modified or even revoked.

The wording of each clause, however, is tightly drafted. In each case, it limits the committee's powers of review to orders, in the case of the professional conduct committee, made under clause 22 and, in the case of the health committee, to those made under clause 23. Under normal circumstances, that is unlikely to create any difficulty. However, in cases where an appeal had been made—for example, to the appeal tribunal against a decision of the health committee—the order in force would not, strictly speaking, be one made under clause 23 but under what is currently new clause 3. The same point would also apply to orders made on appeal to Her Majesty in Council under clause 30.

The question has been raised, therefore, whether the professional conduct committee and the health committee would have the power to review orders made on appeal under the provisions of another clause as to the way that they could review those that they had made. They ought to have that power. It was always our intention that they should have that power.

The amendments, therefore, remove any uncertainty about the position by including a reference to those orders made on appeal under the provisions of other specific clauses.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) consider carefully a point that is not covered by the amendments? I have referred to equity for those who are accused of an offence. They may be accused of having obtained their registration improperly or fraudulently, they may be accused of having subsequently committed a criminal offence or they may be accused of having subsequently been guilty of professional misconduct. The procedures set out in clause 22, in clause 10 and in clause 21 would then begin, depending on which particular committee was handling the case.

My hon. Friend has told the House that the Bill does not provide for compensation if a practitioner is suspended and it is then found that there is no ground for his suspension. There may have been no merit in the complaint, but the practitioner may have lost considerably in the meantime. It is unsatisfactory that there should be no time frame within which the procedures set out in clause 22 must be completed. It would be possible for the registrar under clause 10 and for the professional conduct committee under clause 22 to take any amount of time to consider such matters.

The process could go on for weeks, for months or for years. Even if the practitioner against whom the procedure was initiated were wholly guiltless, he might have been deprived of the right to practise his profession in the interim, possibly for years, and he might never be able to resume his profession although it had been found that there was no substance in the original complaints against him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East has said several times that he intends that the quasi-judicial disciplinary procedures in the Bill should observe the principles of natural justice. I know that my hon. Friend is sincere in that intention and that there are many reflections of that principle in the Bill. Will he reflect on the point that there is an important dimension of which the Bill does not take account? If the amendment is agreed to, the Bill, for the best possible motives and in the highest-minded fashion, will have laid the basis for some appalling miscarriages of justice, not because the procedures will not be observed and not because the

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people who are involved in the committees intend that there should be any injustice, but simply because investigations will drag on.

The main priority of practising osteopaths will not be to spend time on the professional conduct committee. There will always be the temptation to suspend investigations because of Christmas or Easter. The procedure will drag on and a wholly innocent osteopath who has had an appalling cloud over him for a long time—he may have been suspended by the registrar under clause 10 and he will not have been able to practise in the interim—will lose a lot of money. There will be no redress for the consequential loss of income.

The osteopath will find that he cannot refer to the Bill and say, "Look, the procedures laid down have a time scale attached to them, so I insist that justice is done and that the matter is brought to a conclusion one way or another within that time scale." The absence of a time scale is in conflict with my hon. Friend's laudable intention that justice should be done and that those who are subsequently proved to be completely blameless and against whom unjustified complaints have been made are not damaged.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). I served on the investigations committee of the Lloyd's council for two or three years and I am well aware how long investigations can drag on despite the best intentions of all involved to make them as speedy as possible. In addition to the difficulties mentioned by my hon. Friend, there is the substantial difficulty of obtaining evidence from all the witnesses who may wish to give evidence, of finding out who they are and of ensuring that they have an opportunity to present their case to the investigations committee. These things tend to take a great deal of time and unless substantial incentives or penalties are attached—I share my hon. Friend's concern—people could be grossly out of pocket and badly treated by an investigation into a complaint that ultimately proved groundless or ultimately proved to have been started maliciously by someone who had some reason to wish the practitioner concerned ill.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. Does he agree that there is an inter-relationship between compensation for loss of revenue as a result of a complaint that is subsequently deemed to have been quite unjustified and uncalled for—because the practitioner had committed no offence and because there was no impropriety in the way in which he was registered—and the time scale, to which we attach great importance? If there was provision for compensation, the osteopath who was suspended would find that his claim for compensation would increase with the time taken by the investigation because he would lose more patients and more revenue. The bill would clock up. Would that not act as a major inducement for those carrying out the investigation on behalf of the general council, whether the registrar and his staff or the members serving on the professional conduct committee, to get on with the investigation and to ensure that there were no unreasonable delays in the investigations and the conclusions?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for expanding on the theme. He is absolutely right to say that a provision should be inserted to safeguard the interests of the osteopaths.

Lady Olga Maitland: Could my hon. Friend draw a parallel with any other professional body and with how it deals with the problem? The General Medical Council might be one such example.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am afraid that my hon. Friend has asked the wrong person. That question could be addressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) or to the Minister. I cannot draw a parallel with the General Medical Council because I am not sure how it deals with this problem.

Ms Primarolo: Exactly.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The hon. Lady says, "Exactly". None the less, the point remains a matter of concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) has asked a valuable question and I hope that we shall be given an answer by someone who is able to do so.

My detailed concern relates to the consequence of agreeing to the amendment. Under clause 30, which deals with appeals against the decisions of the professional conduct committee or of the health committee, the way in which the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council will deal with appeals is set out in subsection (7). It says,

"Without prejudice to the application of that Act, on an appeal under this section to Her Majesty in Council, the Judicial Committee may in their report recommend to Her Majesty in Council—

(a) that the appeal be dismissed;

(b) that the appeal be allowed and the decision questioned by the appeal quashed;

(c) "—

this is the point with which we are concerned—

"that such other decision as the Professional Conduct Committee or (as the case may be) Health Committee could have made be substituted for the decision questioned by the appeal; or

(d) that the case be remitted to the Committee concerned to be disposed of in accordance with the directions of the Judicial Committee."

Let us suppose that the Judicial Committee decided to adopt a course under subsection (7)(c) and that it substituted what it considered to be the appropriate response to the allegation against which the appeal was formed. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council decides what is the appropriate penalty to impose or the appropriate step to take.

Once that stage has been reached under amendment No. 59, clause 22(6) will be affected. If unamended, that subsection will deal only with decisions made in the first instance by the professional conduct committee or the health committee. When those committees reach a conclusion,

"At any time while a conditions of practice order is in force under this section, the Committee may (whether or not of its own motion)—

(a) extend, or further extend, the period for which the order has effect;

(b) revoke or vary any of the conditions;

(c) require the osteopath concerned to pass a test of competence specfied by the Committee;

(d) reduce the period for which the order has effect; or

(e) revoke the order."

It is clear that the amendment, if passed, will undermine the purpose of taking appeals to the committee of the Privy Council. If that committee then substitutes an order that, in its view, should have been made by the health committee or the professional conduct committee in the first place, it can override, reverse or otherwise interfere with the original decision.

11.30 am

The amendment cannot possibly have been intended so to undermine the value of the process of appealing to the committee of the Privy Council. I urge my hon. Friend to give careful consideration to the consequences of his proposal and to ensure that it is further amended to avoid those consequences. The matter is complicated and I do not expect an immediate response—which, in any case, would not be possible under the rules of the House. However, I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that the amendment is itself amended—although I appreciate the merit of what it attempts to achieve. Its drafting is clearly deficient.

Mr. Moss: I shall attempt to answer some of the points raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies).

The issue of compensation has been raised twice. Let me repeat what I said earlier: the Bill provides no grounds for compensation at any stage. However, in all other statutory regulation schemes affecting the health professions there is also no compensation clause. The insertion of such a clause in this Bill would be a first.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) asked about the General Medical Council. I suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding consult his father, who will tell him that no compensation scheme is paid under the GMC's procedures. I would have expected my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding to know that.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Before my hon. Friend leaps to refute my scurrilous allegation of a shortage of knowledge to which I myself am happy to admit, let me explain that the crux of my hon. Friend's point—the part that I was endorsing—related not to a desire for a compensation clause, but to a desire for a mechanism limiting the time that could be taken.

Mr. Moss: I was coming to that. Clause 24(4) states:

"Before making an interim suspension order, the Committee shall give the osteopath in question an opportunity to appear before it and tc argue his case against the making of the proposed order."

Under subsection (5),

"At any such hearing the osteopath shall be entitled to be legally represented."

There is an appeal procedure, again with legal representation. Under clause 31(3),

"The order shall specify the period of the suspension, which shall not exceed two months beginning with the date on which the order is made."

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 60, in page 17, line 39, after 'section', insert

'or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

No. 61, in page 18, line 42, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

No. 62, in page 19, line 2, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.

No. 63, in page 19, line 12, after 'section', insert

'or under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)* or by virtue of a recommendation under section 30(7)(c)'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 26

INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS: PROCEDURAL RULES

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 21, line 42, leave out paragraph (e) and insert—

'(e) securing that—

(i) any hearing before the Professional Conduct Committee is held in public unless the Committee decides that it is in the interests of the person making the allegation, or of any person giving evidence or of any patient, to hold the hearing or any part of it in private; and

(ii) any hearing before the Health Committee is held in private unless the Committee considers that it is appropriate to hold the hearing or any part of it in public;'.

Mr. Moss: Amendment No. 17 is concerned with the hearings of the professional conduct and health committees. As currently drafted, the Bill provides for either committee to hold its hearings in public unless it considers it appropriate for a particular hearing to be held in private. In deciding whether to hold a hearing in private, the committees will be able to take into consideration the interests of the person making the allegation, or of any patient or other person giving evidence—or, in the case of the health committee, the interests of the osteopath concerned.

The amendment has two purposes. First, it builds in a degree of flexibility to enable either committee to hold part of the hearing—as distinct from all of it—in public or in private. Secondly, it changes the default position of the health committee's hearings by providing for them to be held in private unless the committee considers it appropriate to hold all or part of them in public.

The second feature is the more significant. Health committee hearings are likely to raise matters of a personal and sensitive nature. They could, for example, shine a spotlight on a medical problem which, until then, the osteopath had refused to recognise. It may also be necessary to discuss, or ask for evidence to be produced about, matters of a very personal nature. That could make the whole procedure rather traumatic.

It is important for the Bill to recognise that proceedings before the health committee would be completely different from those that take place before the professional conduct committee. The professional conduct committee hearings will focus on allegations of misconduct, incompetence and conviction of a criminal offence: they will be concerned with matters of professional discipline. That will not apply to health committee hearings. For the reasons that I mentioned earlier, there will be an imperative need for confidentiality; without that, the procedures would risk failing to win the confidence of the profession. It could also mean that any encouragement that the GOC may try to give the profession in the future to refer cases of sick colleagues would be met by a wall of silence. Changing the default position of the health committees' hearings in this way would overcome those concerns, and would also bring

[Mr. Moss]

the osteopaths scheme into line with the practice adopted by other statutory schemes for health professionals which make provision for a similar committee.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I have some problems with the amendment. The assumption behind it is that, whereas it may be a matter of public interest for a case to be heard by the professional conduct committee—in the sense that unprofessional or criminal conduct on the part of the practitioner may be alleged—the health of a practitioner is not a matter of public interest.

Is it not a matter of public interest that, for example, a practitioner may have AIDS? I cannot comment on the possibility of HIV being transmitted from practitioner to patient during a course of osteopathic treatment, but I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend has to say about that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) knows, the question whether medical practitioners have an infectious disease has become a matter of intense public interest in recent months. That must be especially true in the case of a disease such as HIV, for which there is no cure and in respect of which the prognosis is always fatal.

No doubt my hon. Friend will respond with his usual courtesy and knowledge of the subject. I hope that, in doing so, he will not refer me again to the practice of the medical profession and the BMA general council and disciplinary committee—for several reasons. First, I do not pretend to hold a brief—and nor, I think, would my father wish to say that he held a particular brief—for the BMA.

Secondly, the BMA and the royal college have existed for many generations. There is therefore an established jurisprudence: we can see how in practice the BMA handles allegations of professional misconduct and so on. That means that concerns such as those expressed today about, for example, the time that investigations will take and about compensation do not necessarily arise with the same force. We have a whole record of historic experience of the BMA, whereas in the Bill, however, we are setting up a completely new and untested body. There will be some comfort to be taken from the fact that the body will be under the supervision of the Privy Council, but we do not know who the members of the council will be. Osteopaths have no record of supervising themselves and their profession. I am sure that they will make a great success of it, but if we are to set the new body on the right course, it is appropriate for such questions to be asked and that they should be convincingly and adequately answered.

Finally, doctors in particular would find it especially ironic were they told that osteopaths would never aspire to higher standards than the medical profession and that, where the medical profession has certain established procedures—for example, for disciplinary hearings—higher standards could not possibly be set in a new Bill to establish a new professional body for a new profession.

Lady Olga Maitland: In considering when evidence should be given in public and when in private, it is extremely important both to prevent a witch hunt and to keep the public interest very much in mind. There must be a careful delineation and a careful judgment about when each is appropriate. I imagine that a patient would find it well-nigh impossible to give evidence on very personal matters if he knew that the information would be in the public domain. That point of view must be respected if, without such evidence, the investigation could not continue.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am puzzled about the logic and one of the consequences of the amendments. As I understand it, the original hearing will be in private if it is before the health committee, but the appeal will be in public. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) said earlier that he thought that there was a difference, in the sense that the original hearing was at the instigation of someone who was making a complaint whereas the appeal was at the instigation of the osteopath against whom the complaint was made. Presumably, we are supposed to think that that justifies the fact that the second hearing will be in public whereas the first has been in private. I do not follow the logic of that.

It is true that it is the osteopath who brings the appeal, but he would not have to bring the appeal if he did not feel aggrieved by the judgment in the first hearing. I do not see why he should be forced, by the application of a different criterion, to bring all these matters out into the open, having been able to keep them within the privacy of the general council in the first instance.

I take the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). None the less, I feel that the osteopath should have a right of privacy and, in circumstances in which it is held to be correct that he should be allowed to have a hearing in private in the first instance, there is a lack of justice in the matter being forced into the open on appeal.

11.45 am

Mr. Sackville: We are discussing the important question of fitness to practise. The King's Fund working party described the need to secure a high standard of professional conduct among registered practitioners as

"one of the primary functions of the Council of a self-regulating profession."

It went on:

"Although detailed arrangements for ensuring this vary slightly from one profession to another, the features common to most professions are: first, the promulgation of ethical notes for the guidance of practitioners or rules of professional conduct; secondly, machinery for investigating allegations of unacceptable professional conduct; and, thirdly, procedures governing the preferment of charges before, and the hearing of charges and the imposition of penalties by, a suitably constituted domestic tribunal."

Readers of the Bill will be aware that those are all important elements of the proposed statutory scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has already said that not all other similar statutory schemes make provision for a health committee. The King's Fund working party commented that the statutory provision of a health committee has been made in more recent times

"for the better protection of both practitioners and the public . . . to deal with those practitioners who should not be allowed to practise for reasons of ill health."

The King's Fund working party went on to recommend the establishment of a health committee which would be

"responsible for hearing cases referred to it by the Investigating Committee where it seems to the latter that there is prima facie evidence of ill health sufficient to warrant suspending a practitioner's right to practise altogether or

requiring him or her as a condition of continuing registration to comply with certain conditions (for example to practise under supervision)".

Once again, my hon. Friend's Bill incorporates a key recommendation of the working party. In addition to ensuring that the fitness-to-practise machinery provides adequate safeguards for members of the public, it is important that it has the ability to take account of the needs of osteopaths in appropriate circumstances. My hon. Friend has described the need to provide for hearings of the health committee to be in private unless the committee considers it appropriate for all or part of a hearing to be in public. I fully support his argument. Such hearings are likely to touch on sensitive and personal matters that neither have a place within, nor a need to be brought into, the public domain.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will my hon. Friend the Minister concede that if an osteopath has an infectious and extremely dangerous disease that he might have passed on to his patients, it would be a matter of concern, at least to his patients, to know whether they had contracted that particular virus or bacterium? In those circumstances, it would not be right to keep the facts of the case purely to the privacy of the health committee meeting.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. However, I refer him to the guidelines for the medical profession, that make a clear distinction between procedures that are invasive and likely to give rise to the transmission of HIV or similar infections and procedures that are not. Those guidelines are very clear. I also remind my hon. Friend of recent announcements that put into perspective the whole question of the infectiveness of those who carry the HIV virus.

In addition to ensuring the fitness to practise machinery to provide safeguards, it is important to take the needs into account. I welcome the flexibility that the amendment provides in balancing the wider public interest with that of an individual witness appearing before the professional conduct committee. Without the amendment, the committee would have the choice only between holding the entire hearing in public or in private. If the amendment is accepted, it will enable the committee to take that decision in respect of different parts of the hearing.

Therefore, the amendment is important to fine tune the provisions of the fitness to practise machinery. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East in urging the House to accept it.

Mr. Moss: The question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) about HIV status has been clarified by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Minister said that the guidelines laid down for the medical profession which distinguish between diseases that hold some hazard for patients and those that do not are very clear. He is right: they are clear. My point is that they are not clear in respect of the osteopathy profession for which we are now legislating. Should not the clarity that exists in the medical profession be introduced into the osteopathic profession by virtue of the Bill?

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend the Minister made it quite clear that the rules and guidelines issued by the Department of Health are clear cut. As osteopaths do not use invasive procedures, they do not come within the ambit of the Department's guidelines.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) was mistaken when he referred to diseases. He should have referred to the procedures. That is the differentiation which must be made.

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) made an excellent point. She was absolutely right, and her point goes to the heart of the amendment. We want to establish a situation in which the choice exists with relation to investigations before the health committee. We are not saying that the hearing must be in private or in public. We are saying that it can be held in private unless the committee considers it appropriate to hold the hearing, or any part of it, in public. The choice is there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) drew attention not to a discrepancy, but to a difference in relation to the wording of new clause 3 about appeals that are held in public and the opportunity for hearings to be heard in private in respect of the health committee investigation. The appeal in public in respect of the health committee is subject to rules covered in the Bill. Those rules could say that the appeal should be in private if the osteopath so requests.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 29

Appeals against decisions of the Registrar

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I beg to move amendment No. 52, in page 23, line 40 leave out 'on a point of law'.

The amendment deals with the question of an appeal to an appropriate court in the event of a registrar refusing to register an applicant or to take some of the other steps open to him that might leave the applicant aggrieved. If that happens, the applicant should appeal to the general council.

Under clause 29, an appeal to the general council will be "subject to such rules as the General Council may make for the purpose of regulating appeals under this section." That relates to the point very fully and ably made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) about the way in which we are taking the Bill forward.

It is far from clear—and we have no guidance about this—what rules the general council may make in those circumstances. In respect of the clauses that deal with what the general council can do with regard to the health committee and the committee that deals with complaints of a criminal or disciplinary nature, there is a long list of things about which the council may or shall make rules. I have already expressed at length my reservations about the flexibility which is allowed to it even in those circumstances, but in these circumstances there are absolutely no rules limiting what the general council can do. Under subsection (2), it is clear that it may make such rules as it wishes.

I take into account the fact that the general council will be a very worthy body, and that it will have not the slightest desire to make any rules that are not in the interests of justice or the interests of those who are to be

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

subject to these procedures. None the less, the members will not be legally qualified. It must be a matter of concern that, in something that is starting from an entirely clean sheet and in respect of which there are no precedents, there is no measure by which we can judge the way in which the council is likely to proceed. We must have substantial concern about whether justice will be done in such circumstances.

It is the core of the Bill that there should be a properly compiled register, that the terms of registration should be subject to rules and that the ways in which registration is dealt with are properly administered. It is no good at all arriving at that stage and finding that, when an appeal is made because something has gone wrong, those rules go out the window and other rules are substituted that might fall very far short of the standard that we would require.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Is not the substance of the clause unamended and the problem, therefore, that my hon. Friend is addressing in his amendment the fact that the existing text of the Bill is, in effect, an attempt to prejudice the decision of a court—or rather, to use statute in an effort to prevent a court from subsequently accepting jurisdiction as it might choose otherwise to do on any appeal or on any event arising from an alleged breach of justice during the procedures that have been laid down in the Bill—that is, the disciplinary procedures and the appeals on them? Is it not thoroughly unsatisfactory that we should legislate in this way, by explicit legislation of this kind, to try to prevent a court from subsequently accepting jurisdiction and examining the full facts of the case, as that court might decide it is appropriate to do in the circumstances at the time?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend has a very good habit of anticipating everything that I wish to put before the House. Of course he is right. I am now coming to the point of my amendment, which is specific, relating to clause 29(4), which, as unamended, states:

"Any person aggrieved by the decision of the General Council on an appeal under this section may appeal, on a point of law, to the appropriate court"—

that is, appeal on a point of law only to an appropriate court.

If the general council and the registrar were in error of fact, the court—whichever court would be the appropriate one; almost certainly it would be the High Court of Justice —would be debarred from hearing a case in which the grounds of the appellant's reasoning to try to go to that court were based on an error of fact.

We do not know what rules the general council will make with regard to appeals against the decision of the registrar, but it would not be acting in any way out of precedents from other organisations were it to adopt a procedure that is limited to taking evidence in writing, for example. There are many instances in quasi-judicial bodies in which evidence in writing is all that is considered by the regulatory body, and no opportunity is given to the person who is aggrieved to give evidence in person, to call witnesses to answer questions, or to cross-question those who oppose a decision.

Mr. Bowis: Will my hon. Friend explain whether the aggrieved person could be the registrar, on the assumption that the previously aggrieved person has won one stage of the appeal and therefore the registrar could be the aggrieved person at the next stage? I do not understand the relationship between subsection (4) and the next one, which appears to suggest that subsection (4) is in addition to any right of appeal elsewhere. Does that cover my hon. Friend's point? If so, there appears to be legal complexity and confusion that need to be clarified.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In response to the first of the two questions that my hon. Friend put, clearly the registrar could not be the aggrieved person, because subsection (4) deals only with matters arising out of subsection (1). The contents of subsection (1) relate entirely to what the registrar has decided to do. The chances of the registrar appealing vigorously against his own decision seem unlikely—indeed, impossible. The answer to my hon. Friend's first question is that the appeal will take place only when the registrar has done something which, in the view of the person whom he has damaged, he should not have done.

12 noon

In response to my hon. Friend's second question, I am not absolutely clear, to be honest, why subsection (5) has been put in. If there is a small claim that could go to a county court instead of the High Court, subsection (5) seems to exclude the limitations of subsection (4), so that, in the event of a small claim, it would appear that, on a matter of fact, the appellant could still take the case to court.

However, if an osteopath is not registered by the registrar, and if that is wrongful, the level of damage that the osteopath will suffer will be way beyond anything that it is within the competence of the county court to amend or give adequate damages for. So the significance of subsection (4) is that in a matter that could have serious financial consequences, the person involved will be debarred from taking any case to court unless he can find a point of law on which he can base his claim for redress. I fear that it will often not be possible to do so, because most of the decisions do not turn on points of law such as whether the tribunal acted outside its powers or whether something was done that the laws of the land say should not have been done.

It is much more likely that the registrar will base his decision on a fact that the aggrieved person alleges to be false. I can think of few circumstances in which subsection (4) would allow an appeal against the decision. Therefore, I am extremely concerned that the amendment should be accepted and that "on a point of law" should be deleted from the clause.

Earlier today, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) said that appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council should be only on a point of law, because the committee did not want to have to find on detailed matters of medical fact. From several years of experience of practice in English law, I can assure my hon. Friend that the High Court has no such inhibition. If it did, many people who have been injured by the medical profession would find it difficult if not impossible to achieve redress, because they would not find a judge who was willing to set himself up to try such a case. That is not how English law operates.

In English law, the judge sits in court and takes evidence from experts in the medical field and comes to a proper conclusion. If he does not, one can go to the Court

of Appeal. So, whatever may or may not be the case for an appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the reason that my hon. Friend gave cannot justify removing the right of an aggrieved person to take an appeal from the general council to the High Court. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that point.

Mr. Moss: I rise tentatively to answer my hon.—and learned—Friend after five minutes of learned exposition. As he said, the amendment seeks to provide for the appeal to the High Court, or its equivalent under the clause, to be permitted on any ground and not merely on a point of law. Clause 29 deals with appeals against a decision of the registrar connected with registration. The appeal to the High Court is neither the only answer nor the first appeal provided against a decision that the registrar might make under clause 29.

In the first instance, the osteopath would have a right of appeal to the general council. It would be an open appeal that would not be restricted to points of law and would amount to a complete re-examination of the case in question. In addition to an appeal being permitted from the council on the ground that the council had got the law wrong——

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Moss: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I am in mid-sentence. I do not mind being subject to a hard time, but being stopped in full flow is a little off-putting.

An appeal could be permitted if it were felt that the general council had got the law wrong. In addition, a decision of the general council that was so unreasonable as to be perverse would also be eligible for appeal to the High Court, because that would involve a point of law.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I tried to interrupt him before he had completed that sentence because he had moved off the point on which I wanted to intervene about a full re-examination of an appellant's case by the general council.

That relates to my concern about there being no guarantee under clause 29(2) about how the general council will make the rules about an appeal. There are plenty of precedents in other circumstances where such an appeal did not amount to a full rehearing of a case. My hon. Friend is not in a position to assure the House that that will not be the case under the Bill, because it is subject to a decision that the general council has not yet been called upon to make. My concern is that we are putting on the statute book a Bill which cannot guarantee an aggrieved person the rights that my hon. Friend has told us that that person will have.

Mr. Moss: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but he has omitted to say that all the rules that the general council will introduce, in good time, will be looked at most carefully by the Privy Council. If it feels that the general council is not moving in the right direction, it can intervene in the interests of natural justice.

Although I concur with the intention behind my hon. Friend's amendment, it is unnecessary for the appeal to the High Court or its equivalent to amount to a secondary consideration of the matter. I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I remain profoundly disturbed by this part of the Bill and I fear that injustice may result from it. In the light of what my hon. Friend has said, however, and the assurances that he has given, I, with some reluctance, beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 30

Appeals against decisions of the Professional Conduct Committee and the Health Committee

Amendments made: No. 18, in page 24, line 12, leave out 'of the Health Committee is made under section 23', and insert 'is made by an appeal tribunal hearing an appeal under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*'.

No. 19, in page 24, line 21, at end insert—

'( ) An appeal under subsection (1)(b) may only be on a point of law.'.

No. 20, in page 24, line 24, leave out 'may appear as' and insert 'shall be the'.

No. 21, in page 24, line 39, after 'Committee' insert 'or appeal tribunal'.

No. 22, in page 24, line 42, leave out subsection (8). —*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 31

Offences

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 25, line 7, leave out from 'by' to 'rules', in line 8, and insert'—

(a) the Professional Conduct Committee,

(b) the Health Committee, or

(c) an appeal tribunal hearing an appeal under section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*,

under'.

No. 24, in page 25, line 8, after '(h)' insert

'or under any corresponding rules made by virtue of section *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)(4)*'.— *[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 32

Competition and anti-competitive practices

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 25, in page 25, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) For the purposes of any order under section 56 of the Act of 1973 or section 10 of the Act of 1980, section 90(4) of the Act (power to apply orders to existing agreements) shall have effect in relation to a regulatory provision as it has effect in relation to an agreement.'.

At present non-statutory professional associations of osteopaths are subject to the monopoly provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the provisions concerning anti-competitive practices in the Competition Act 1980.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has the authority to make orders by statutory instrument to require the associations to make any changes to their rules or guidance, that the Secretary of State considers necessary, to remedy effects that a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report have found to be adverse to the public interest.

The purpose of clause 32 is to ensure that the statutory regulations of the osteopathic profession should not remove the rules of the profession from the scope of competition law. That would be the result if rules made under statutory authority were not considered to be agreements for the purposes of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Clause 32 empowers the Secretary of State to make a competition order under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act or the Competition Act in respect of any

[Mr. Moss]

regulatory provisions made by the general council and its statutory committees—the education committee, the investigating committee, the professional conduct committee and health committee—or any of its other committees, including sub-committees.

The amendment makes it clear that the principle is that regulatory provisions, as defined under clause 32(1) shall be treated as agreements—the purpose of orders made by the Secretary of State follow reports by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or the Competition Act 1980. The amendment makes it clear that the principle applies to section 90(4) of the Fair Trading Act.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 33

DEFAULT POWERS OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 25, line 36, leave out 'consider' and insert 'considers'.

No. 27, in page 25, line 39, leave out "themselves' and insert 'itself'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 35

EXERCISE OF POWERS OF PRIVY COUNCIL

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 26, line 20, leave out 'or 17' and insert

'17 or *(Appeals against decisions of the Health Committee)*'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 36

PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 26, line 33, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

I return to my favourite hobby horse—the difference between "may" and "shall" under clause 36, which is designed to ensure that practising osteopaths are properly insured should anything horrible happen to their patients. I declare an interest in that I am a member of Lloyd's and could be said to have an minor vested interest in whether people insure themselves. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has a more direct interest, as a broker, in seeing that people are properly insured.

Putting aside all such personal interests, I believe that there can be no doubt that it is in the interests of patients for osteopaths to be adequately insured so that, in the awful event of their being negligent and something happening to their clients, they can obtain a remedy in the courts for their injuries. We should not have the appalling incidents, that sometimes occur, where patients successfully sue, but then find that the person sued is a man of straw. In those cases, such patients cannot obtain redress.

Therefore, I am profoundly unhappy that, under clause 36, the general council is left with the discretion to decide whether to ensure that its osteopath members are insured. While osteopathy is a science, not an art, it is an imprecise science. There is no doubt that there are instances where the treatment does not work and those being treated come out worse than when they went in. That is true of most professions and I am not singling out osteopathy, which can be beneficial but can also be harmful.

As a result of my indiscretions as a youth when I drove a fast car, I am a frequent client of osteopaths and, over the years, I have found them to be a mixed bunch. Some of them have done me much good. However, one osteopath who treated me 10 or 12 years ago in Cheshire, who was much used by the Cheshire hunt and had a superb reputation, left me in a state of almost total immobility. I spent half an hour on his couch and came away in excrutiating agony. I returned to London and, following a visit to my usual osteopath, emerged more or less in one piece.

There is no doubt that there are likely to be cases in which osteopaths are sued for what they have done and it is extremely important that they should have the resources behind them so that the person whom they have injured can obtain financial compensation. It is unsatisfactory for the general council to be left with discretion in that matter. I hope that the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East will accept the amendment.

Mr. Bowis: I entirely endorse the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). It seems osteopathy is now becoming a profession which should require professional indemnity insurance. My hon. Friend mentioned the rules governing insurance brokers, and such insurance is required for them. It is common among professions for indemnity to be a requirement and I see no reason why it should be an option for osteopaths. If the Government have any doubts, I should point out that in previous cases where insurance policies have been lacking, it is inevitably the Government who are asked by the public to compensate someone for something that has gone wrong. It is in the interests of the Government, the profession and the patients that the Bill should read "shall", not "may".

Mr. Sackville: I must remind my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) that the Bill is about self-regulation, not about laying down in detail every aspect of how the profession should be run. The Bill builds on almost half a century of successful self-regulation by the profession, so it would be out of place if we began now to lay specific duties on the profession in respect of insurance. I should like the House to consider the amendment in that light and I ask my hon. Friend not to press it.

12.15 pm

Mr. Moss: With this amendment my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster raises one of the most important aspects of the legislation. I appreciate the sensitivities that surround the important subject of professional indemnity insurance. I know that the profession takes the matter seriously and I am sure that the general council will consider it with equal seriousness. The profession clearly demonstrated through its voluntary registration scheme that it has a responsible attitude towards patient safety.

The need for practitioners to hold professional indemnity insurance was also a key recommendation of the King's Fund working party report. I am confident, however, that the recommendation did not emanate from a concern that the professionals' attitude was in any way lacking in this area. The amendment brings us back to the

debate on whether the general council should be required to make rules or should be allowed to make up its own mind.

I have already made clear my reasons for believing that it would be a mistake to remove from the general council the responsibility for making this decision. Agreeing to the amendment would be to tell the council that we do not trust it to make a sensible decision—a terrible indictment of both council and profession. It would also cut across the principle of self-regulation on which the scheme is to be founded.

I remind the House that the provisions of clause 36 are perhaps the most comprehensive in any health care statutory scheme. They would enable the general council to make rules to require practising osteopaths to hold professional indemnity insurance. The general council would also have the power to check that a practitioner had renewed his cover at the right time and, most important, to initiate disciplinary proceedings if he had not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster referred to a connection with the insurance industry which he and I might have. I remind him that the industry itself is wholly against any mandatory requirement in the legislation requiring insurance of any kind, because that runs counter to selectivity.

I have received a letter from the deputy chief executive of the Association of British Insurers. I received it during the Committee stage, but it is relevant to my hon. Friend's point:

"I thought that it would be of assistance to you to be aware that the ABI is pleased to see that regulation now leaves the question of professional indemnity insurance to the discretion of the general osteopathic council. This satisfactorily avoids the insurance industry being placed in the position where a refusal to provide professional indemnity to an osteopath might lead to an accusation that he was being deprived of his livelihood by non-availability of insurance. Insurers must retain the right to decline to provide insurance in individual cases and to charge a premium at a level they regard as appropriate but which an osteopath might regard as excessive in his particular case."

Mr. Bowis: I hope that we are not seeking to establish the principle that there should never be a requirement for insurance. The cost of insurance may reflect the status and standing of a person or business seeking the cover. That should not be a reason for not requiring insurance but for making sure that those seeking cover reach the required standards. In many instances, legislation requires insurance by employers and public liability companies or professions. I accept what the Minister said about self-regulation. That may be a strong steer from the House that we expect rather than require the taking out of insurance.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has not risen, I assume that he does not wish to reply to the last point by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). I take issue with the Minister who seemed to imply that, because the Bill is self-regulatory, the House should not lay down any principle by which the excellent people who will make up the general council should abide. The Bill is littered with requirements. Clause 6 states what the register shall show and clause 19 states:

"The General Council shall prepare and from time to time publish a Code of Practice"

It also states what the code of practice shall be. Clause 20(12) states:

"Where the Investigating Committee concludes that there is a case to answer".

Throughout the Bill, Parliament in its wisdom has decided what the general council shall do, and rightly so. Although there is to be self-regulation, there is a clear need for central guidance so that the public and the House can have confidence in that self-regulation.

I take note of what my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East said about insurance. I also note the desire of the Association of British Insurers that insurance should not be compulsory. I entirely take that point, but I am concerned that the less insurable the osteopath, if I may put it that way, the greater the risk to his patient. If an osteopath is so uninsurable as to make his practice unviable, his clients should be placed in a strong state of red alert before they lie on his couch.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Did my hon. Friend have the same difficulty as I had in following the logic of the letter from the deputy chief executive of the Association of British Insurers which was read to us by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss)? The general council, using the discretion that my hon. Friend would like to see in his Bill, may decide that a rule for registration is that every practising osteopath shall carry professional liability insurance. If that rule emanates from the general council rather than from statute, it will be open to an osteopath who has been refused insurance to claim that the insurance industry is depriving him of his livelihood. The effect on the registered osteopath who has been denied insurance will be the same whether the rule that he has to carry insurance is imposed by the general council or by statute. The difference that the amendment would make to the text of the Bill should make us consider whether we would feel confident that, in all circumstances, osteopaths will carry insurance or whether we have to take it on trust that the general council will use its best judgment in deciding whether to impose such a rule. That is a different issue from the one that was addressed in the letter from the ABI.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is right. The logic of the letter from the ABI is that the osteopath should have insurance, but it should not be compulsory. The true state of affairs is that it is more than likely that the osteopath will not have any insurance at all, but that the client will not know that. That is the focus of my concern. I fear that we shall end up with people practising on the margin of their profession, probably with very few personal assets, and that their clients will be at substantial risk.

In the light of what has been said, my amendment would not be appropriate. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East to see whether there is a way to safeguard the client's position in the event of an osteopath practising neither with substantial personal wealth nor with an insurance policy that will cover his client against the consequences of any negligence on his part or any legal liability arising. I hope that the Bill will not proceed through the other place without an appropriate amendment being inserted. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 39

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 29, in page 28, line 20, leave out 'as his address'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Clause 40

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT, TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND EXTENT

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 30, in page 29, line 1, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

'(6) The transitional provisions of Part III of the Schedule shall have effect.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take amendment No. 45, in page 35, line 36, at end insert—

'PART III

'TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

The initial membership of the General Council

43. When first constituted, the membership of the General Council shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of this Schedule as modified by this Part.

The transitional periods

44. In this Part—

"the three year transitional period" means the period beginning with the passing of this Act and ending with the third anniversary of the opening of the register;

"the four year transitional period" means the period beginning with the passing of this Act and ending with the fourth anniversary of the opening of the register; and

"the five year transitional period" means the period beginning with the passing of this Act and ending with the fifth anniversary of the opening of the register.

The osteopathic members

45.—(1) During the three year transitional period, paragraph 1(a) shall have effect as if it provided for the appointment of 12 members by the Privy Council.

(2) Each of those members shall be appointed by the Privy Council after consultation with bodies in the United Kingdom appearing to the Privy Council to represent practising osteopaths.

(3) When appointing any such member the Privy Council shall designate him as a person appointed as one of the 12 members provided for by paragraph 1(a) (as modified by this paragraph).

(4) In this paragraph "osteopathic member" means a member designated under this paragraph.

(5) Each of the osteopathic members shall, at the time of his appointment, be a person appearing to the Privy Council to be a practising osteopath.

(6) One of the osteopathic members shall be expressly appointed as a member who is also a registered medical practitioner at the time of his appointment.

(7) Paragraph 6 shall not apply to any of the osteopathic members.

(8) Subject to paragraphs 4 to 7, the term of office of each of the osteopathic members shall end at the end of the three year transitional period.

The lay members

46.—(1) The members appointed by the Privy Council under paragraph 1(b) during the five year transitional period shall each be designated by the Privy Council as a person appointed under paragraph 1(b).

(2) In this Part "lay member" means a member designated under this paragraph.

(3) Paragraph 11 shall have effect during the five year transitional period as if "registered osteopaths" and "registered osteopath" read, respectively, "persons appearing to the Privy Council to be practising osteopaths" and "a person appearing to the Privy Council to be a practising osteopath".

(4) Subject to paragraphs 4 to 7, the term of office of each of the lay members shall end at the end of the five year transitional period.

The education members

47.—(1) During the four year transitional period paragraph 1(c) shall have effect as if it provided for the appointment of 3 members by the Privy Council.

(2) Each of those members shall be appointed by the Privy Council after consultation with the Secretary of State.

(3) When appointing any such member the Privy Council shall designate him as a person appointed as one of the 3 members provided for by paragraph 1(c) (as modified by this paragraph).

(4) The 3 education members shall be persons appearing to the Privy Council to be qualified to advise the General Council on matters relating to education and training in osteopathy.

(5) In this paragraph "education member" means a member designated under this paragraph.

(6) Paragraph 6 shall not apply to any of the education members.

(7) Subject to paragraphs 4 to 7, the term of office of each of the education members shall end at the end of the four year transitional period.

The Secretary of State's nominee

48. Subject to paragraphs 4 to 7, the term of office of any person appointed by the Secretary of State under paragraph 1(d) during the four year transitional period shall come to an end at the end of that period.

Appointment of first Chairman

49.—(1) The first Chairman of the General Council shall be appointed by the Privy Council from among the lay members to serve as such until the end of the first meeting of the Council to be held after the first election of members under paragraph 1(a).

(2) If a person appointed as Chairman of the Council during the three year transitional period fails to serve his full term of office as Chairman, his successor as Chairman shall be appointed by the Privy Council from among the lay members for the residue of the unexpired term.

(3) Paragraph 14(3) shall have effect in relation to any Chairman appointed by the Privy Council under this paragraph as if for paragraph (c) there were substituted—

"(c) his removal by the Privy Council, where the Privy Council agrees to a request for his removal made by a majority of the other members of the General Council;".

(4) Paragraph 14(3)(d) shall not apply in relation to any person serving as the Chairman appointed by the Privy Council under this paragraph.'.

Mr. Moss: The amendments provide transitional arrangements for the establishment of the first general council. These are important provisions, which I know are of particular interest to the osteopathic profession. The statutory scheme must provide the profession, in the form of its general council, with the means to realise its objectives. For that reason, 12 out of the proposed 24 members of the general osteopathic council will be fully registered osteopaths elected by the profession. Eight of the remaining members will be non-osteopaths appointed by the Privy Council. Those members will represent wider

interests and, in particular, the views of patients. That will help to increase the breadth of experience within the general council and ensure that the profession has a firm and balanced basis from which to develop in the future.

The other four members of the general council will have specific responsibilities for education and training and one will be nominated by the Secretary of State with the other three being appointed by the education committee. The balance of different members is mirrored in all other statutory regulatory schemes and the scheme itself, like all its counterparts, will be overseen by the Privy Council.

It is not possible for the arrangements in the schedule to apply for the first general council because, at the outset of the scheme, there will be no registered osteopaths either to be elected or to vote. Nor will there be an education committee to appoint the three members of the general council concerned with education and training. Special transitional arrangements must be provided to cover the early years. Those arrangements form the substance of amendment No. 45.

There are a number of keys to understanding how the transitional arrangements will work. The first is that all the initial osteopathic lay and educational members of the general council will be appointed by the Privy Council. That is in keeping with the practice followed in the establishment of other statutory schemes and was endorsed by the working party in its report. To ensure that the general council will reflect a balance of good professional opinion, experience and practice, the initial osteopathic members will be appointed after consultation with those bodies that administer the current scheme of voluntary registration. However, the individuals will not be representative of any particular organisation. Nor will they be beholden to any sector interest. They will, instead, be selected on the basis of their individual ability and merit and, in effect, be ambassadors to the profession as a whole.

The second key is the specific identification and linking of the initial osteopathic members, lay members, education members and the Secretary of State's nominee, mentioned under the third heading of the schedule and described under the general council members in paragraph 1. That is an important key. Without it, the establishment of the statutory committee would be thrown into confusion. For example, because all but one of the initial members of the general council are to be appointed by the Privy Council, to which three members of the general council appointed by the Privy Council is paragraph 25(b) referring?

The third key is that the transitional arrangements are primarily concerned with putting the osteopathic members in place. Once the ball for the appointment of other members of the general council is set rolling, they should be able to look after themselves.

The final key is that the initial education members will be appointed in the first instance as members of the general council and their membership of the education committee then follows as a consequence. That is the same principle as will apply, with the possible exception of any co-opted members, in respect of the other members of the education committee—that is, membership of the education committee will flow from a person's membership of the general council.

The transitional arrangements also provide for the initial term of office held by the osteopath members, the education members and the lay members to be three, four or five years respectively. That gives effect to the working party's recommendation to provide

"opportunities for gradual change in the membership of the General Council whilst ensuring continuity of experience and expertise by staggering the terms of office of the three groups."

12.30 pm

All that provides a broad-brush picture of the transitional arrangements. However, there are a couple of finer brush strokes that I wish to mention. The first concerns the definition of lay members. Paragraph 11(1)(b) of the schedule describes them as persons

"who are not registered osteopaths."

At the outset of the scheme, however, there will be no registered osteopaths. To clarify who is eligible to be an initial lay member, the transitional arrangements describe it as those persons appearing to the Privy Council as not to be practising osteopaths.

The second brush stroke concerns the education members and the Secretary of State's nominee. The education members are to be persons qualified to advise the general council on matters relating to education and training in osteopathy. The Secretary of State's nominee is to be a person qualified to advise the general council on matters relating to professional education. Those criteria are also intended to apply to their successors and form the subject of amendments Nos. 39 to 41, which we shall discuss later.

The first chairman of the general council will be appointed by the Privy Council from among the lay members and will serve until the first meeting of the council following the first election of the osteopath members, which is three years after the day on which the register is opened. At that meeting, the council must elect a new chairman from among its membership. Again, those arrangements follow the recommendations in the working party's report.

The transitional arrangements will provide the establishment of the first general council in accordance with the recommendations of the King's Fund working party. I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Moss: I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 29, line 5, leave out subsection (7) and insert—

'(7) This Act extends to the United Kingdom except that—

(a) section 37(2) and section *(Data protection and access to personal health information)* (1) extend only to Great Britain;

(b) section *(Data protection and access to personal health information)* (2)(c) and (e) extends only to Scotland;

(c) section 37(3) extends only to Northern Ireland; and

(d) section *(Data protection and access to personal health information)* (2)(b) and (d) extends only to England and Wales.'.

This is a technical amendment to the extant provisions of the Bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule

THE GENERAL COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

Amendment proposed: No. 32, in page 30, line 14, leave out paragraph 4 and insert—

'4.—(1) This paragraph applies where a member fails to complete his full term of office.

(2) In such circumstances as may be prescribed, if the unexpired term is less than the prescribed period the vacancy need not be filled before the end of that term.

(3) If the member's successor is elected or (as the case may be) appointed during the unexpired term, the successor's term of office shall, subject to paragraphs 5 to 7, be for the residue of the unexpired term.

(4) Rules made by the General Council under sub-paragraph (2) shall not prescribe a period of more than twelve months.

(5) In this paragraph "the unexpired term" means the period beginning with the date on which the member ceased to be a member and ending with the date on which his full term of office would have expired.'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 33, in page 30, line 28, after 'osteopath' insert

'at the time of his election'.

No. 34, in page 30, leave out line 30.

No. 35, in page 31, line 9, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

No. 36, in page 31, line 13, after 'practitioner' insert 'at the time of his appointment and shall be'.

No. 37, in page 31, line 14, leave out 'Standing'.

No. 38, in page 31, line 16, after 'osteopaths' insert 'at the time of their appointment'.

No. 39, in page 31, line 25, leave out from 'Committee' to 'training', in line 26 and insert

'to be qualified to advise the General Council on matters relating to education and'.

No. 40, in page 31, line 28, leave out from 'consult' to end of line 29 and insert '—

(a) those institutions in the United Kingdom by which or under whose direction any relevant course of study is given; and

(b) such other bodies (if any) as the Education Committee considers appropriate.

(3) In this paragraph "relevant course of study" has the same meaning as in section 12(2).'.

No. 41, in page 31, line 32, leave out

'experienced in the provision of medical education'

and insert

'qualified to advise the General Council on matters relating to professional education'.

No. 42, in page 34, line 21, leave out sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) and insert—

'(3) Where the Chairman of the Committee is prevented by sub-paragraph (1) or (2) from taking part in an appointment the appointment shall be made in accordance with rules made by the General Council.'.

No. 43, in page 35, line 22, after 'practitioner' insert 'at the time of his appointment'.

No. 44, in page 35, line 33, leave out from '5' to end of line 36 and insert

'none of whom need be registered medical practitioners but at least 3 of whom shall be members of the General Council.'.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I shall try to be brief and not detain the House for too long. I am slightly concerned about two of these amendments, Nos. 40 and 44. Paragraph 12(2) of the schedule states:

"Before making any such appointment, the Committee shall consult those institutions in the United Kingdom which award recognised qualifications."

Amendment No. 40 would leave out from "consult" and insert:

"(a) those institutions in the United Kingdom by which or under whose direction any relevant course of study is given;"

Both the amendment and the original text refer purely to institutions in the United Kingdom. However, earlier in our debates we recognised that provision had been made for osteopaths qualified elsewhere in the European Community, under Community law, to practise in this country.

It might both benefit the profession and enable it to comply with those aspects of Community law that establish a basis for persons to practise their professions in different Community countries if practitioners from other Community countries were appointed to the general council or if appointments were made to the education committee of members of bodies concerned with the training of osteopaths in other Community countries, whose graduates may exercise their right to practise in this country. It is slightly dubious that we should attempt, by means of the Bill, for all time to exclude the possibility of making appointments from institutions outside the United Kingdom.

I have difficulty in following the logic of amendment No. 44. It appears to provide that the quorum of the health committee should not include a registered medical practitioner. According to paragraph 38 of the schedule, a registered medical practitioner has to be a member of the health committee. However, amendment No. 44 explicitly provides that a registered medical practitioner does not have to be a member of the quorum. Decisions can, therefore, be taken by the health committee without the presence of a registered medical practitioner.

I presume that the purpose of providing for a registered medical practitioner to sit on the health committee is to ensure that a doctor can contribute to the decision on whether somebody's physical or mental health makes it impossible for that person to exercise the profession of osteopath. What is the point of providing by statute for a registered medical practitioner to be a member of the health committee and also providing that he does not have to be a member of the quorum?

The non-medical members of the committee could therefore form a quorum and reach a decision on the medical fitness of an individual to continue to practise as an osteopath without a registered medical practitioner being present and without, therefore, there being any professional medical input into what is effectively a clinical decision by the health committee.

Mr. Sackville: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for upholding the rights and privileges of the medical profession, but I am sure that the chairman of the medical committee will be able to decide who should attend what meetings, and when.

My hon. Friend's point about Europe sounds dangerously federalist. In general, though, I think that it is time that we sent the Bill to another place.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made:

No. 33, in page 30, line 28, after 'osteopath' insert 'at the time of his election'.

No. 34, in page 30, leave out line 30.

No. 35, in page 31, line 9, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

No. 36, in page 31, line 13, after 'practitioner' insert 'at the time of his appointment and shall be'.

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No. 38, in page 31, line 16, after 'osteopaths' insert 'at the time of their appointment'.

No. 39, in page 31, line 25, leave out from 'Committee' to 'training', in line 26 and insert

'to be qualified to advise the General Council on matters relating to education and'.

No. 40, in page 31, line 28, leave out from 'consult' to end of line 29 and insert'—

(a) those institutions in the United Kingdom by which or under whose direction any relevant course of study is given; and

(b) such other bodies (if any) as the Education Committee considers appropriate.

(3) In this paragraph "relevant course of study" has the same meaning as in section 12(2).'.

No. 41, in page 31, line 32, leave out

'experienced in the provision of medical education'

and insert

'qualified to advise the General Council on matters relating to professional education'.

No. 42, in page 34, line 21, leave out sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) and insert—

'(3) Where the Chairman of the Committee is prevented by sub-paragraph (1) or (2) from taking part in an appointment the appointment shall be made in accordance with rules made by the General Council.'.

No. 43, in page 35, line 22, after 'practitioner' insert 'at the time of his appointment'.

No. 44, in page 35, line 33, leave out from '5' to end of line 36 and insert

'none of whom need be registered medical practitioners but at least 3 of whom shall be members of the General Council.'.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

12.38 pm

Mr. Sackville: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on having brought what I believe to be the largest private Member's Bill in Parliament's history—I hesitate to say that, given the long history of this Parliament—to a successful conclusion. The Department of Health, which occasionally responded to requests for help in drafting the Bill, supports it. The Bill also reflects the input of 10 Government Departments. The fact that my hon. Friend looks so healthy at the end of all this is a tribute to his resilience.

This is a robust piece of legislation, which weaves through a large number of provisions and policies. It has been carefully considered by the House and has been amended in fairly fine detail. The Government therefore commend the Bill as a finished product, and we are glad to send it in that form to another place.

12.39 pm

Ms Primarolo: I am delighted that we have almost reached the end of our considerations of this excellent Bill, which began its progress through the House with all-party support. Many people outside the House will understand why it takes so long to discuss other pieces of legislation in view of the time that it has taken us to consider a Bill on which initially we apparently all agreed.

I absolutely agree with the Minister. I hope that we have the finished product before us and that it will complete its remaining stages speedily. The Bill builds on the excellent King's Fund report on over 50 years' experience in osteopathy, and it has the support of the British Medical Association and, not least, the support of patients and patient organisations. There are 4 million-plus consultations for back pain every year and the overwhelming majority of those involve osteopaths.

If further recommendation for the Bill is needed, hon. Members should consider the report produced by NAHAT, the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts. The report clearly demonstrates that patients not only have a desire to use osteopaths and complementary medicines, but are using them, that GPs wish to use those services, that health authorities wish to commission those services and that the medical profession recognises the importance of the contribution of osteopathy and of complementary medicines.

The NAHAT report recommends that those services should be available within the national health service. Therefore, I hope not only that the Bill will rapidly reach the statute book, but that it will be the first in a series of Bills to regulate complementary medicines and to ensure that patients are protected, that they have access to properly qualified professionals and that our health service is offering the full range of available medical treatments.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on his patience and on his dedication in getting the Bill through. I sincerely hope that the slight delay in progress because of the thoroughness of our consideration this morning has not marred his experience of promoting the Bill, and that he may later even consider a Bill to regulate homoeopathy.

12.42 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on Third Reading because of a situation in my constituency about which I have recently received a number of letters, to which I wish to draw the Minister's attention. It is important to know how the situation in my constituency will be affected by the Bill, because it is causing a good deal of concern.

I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on his good fortune in the ballot, on his wisdom in selecting this subject for legislation and on his skill in promoting the Bill. I wish him well and I wish the Bill well. I welcome the Bill, although I have some reservations about osteopaths. I know that there are differing views about them. Some think that they are God's gift and some take the opposite view. My inclination is to take the opposite view. I have been to an osteopath only once, and I wish that I had never done so.

While canvassing during the general election of 1964, in which I was first elected to the House, I unfortunately fell heavily on a pavement and suffered acute pain in my back from that moment on. After I had put up with the pain for about a week, someone told me that I should go to an osteopath, and told me where I could find a good one.

Before my hon. Friend introduced measures requiring codes of practice and procedures to check osteopaths' fitness to practice, the greatest accolade accorded to a London osteopath was, "All the ballet dancers go to him or her"; for those in the north, where I live, it was, "All the jockeys go to him or her." I was directed to an osteopath to whom, apparently, all the jockeys went.

The man looked at my back. He felt it, prodded it and twisted me this way and that. Then he said, "I can feel it; you have upset a bone in your back. You have slipped a disc. As you are in the middle of an election campaign, you must wrap cotton wool tightly around the small of your back to keep the heat in. Come back in a week." When I returned in a week, he took all the cotton wool off my back and said, "That's funny—it has come out in a rash. I suppose that it is the badness coming out." I did not quite know what he meant, but I was in a state of total agony, which late at night was relieved only by copious amounts of Scotch whisky.

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

After the osteopath had twisted me around a second time in return for a large fee, I put up with the final week of the election campaign. Then came polling day, when, mercifully, I was elected to the House for the first time. The very next day, I happened to see a doctor, and asked him if he would be kind enough to look at my back. He said, "Why—what is wrong with it?" I told him that I had been in agony for the past two and a half weeks after falling on it. "Let me look at it," he said.

I took off my shirt and removed all the wrappings, exposing the nasty rash which was still on my back. The doctor said, "How long have you had shingles?" I had had shingles all the time that I had been going to that ridiculous osteopath. Ever since then, I have had a very warped view of osteopaths.

Let me turn to a serious issue raised by an osteopath with a very good reputation—not the one I visited; I should add that that one did not work in my constituency. This osteopath, Mr. Sutton, wrote to me from Windermere to draw my attention to a worthwhile scheme that has operated there for the past 15 months. Osteopathic treatment on the national health service is being offered at the local health centre.

I gather that the scheme has been tremendously successful and that 90 of the 120 patients treated in the first 12 months experienced an improvement of more than 80 per cent. That is an impressive result. Mr. Sutton's patients are selected by their GPs, the criterion being that they have not the means to see him privately.

It appears—I want the Minister to pay particular attention here—that, after 30 June this year, the service will have to stop. That is causing great concern to doctors, to Mr. Sutton himself and, most important, to the patients, who are particularly disappointed. I have had a letter from an extremely well-known doctor in Windermere, Dr. Oakden, drawing my attention to the scheme. He tells me that everyone thought that it was a most enlightened step when the Cumbria family health services authority made funds available under the health promotion scheme for the establishment of the clinic, which is an innovation in Cumbria and, I suspect, elsewhere.

Dr. Oakden tells me that the clinic has been a great success, is used by all the doctors practising in Windermere and has significantly reduced the number of patients needing referral to hospital services for physiotherapy and/or the opinion of a consultant orthopaedic surgeon. It would appear that the scheme therefore represents good value for money for the national health service, too. Dr. Oakden tells me that it may be possible to continue with the clinics, under the arrangements for transitional payments, until April 1994, but that the family health services authority has already told him that it will be unable to find funds thereafter. Dr. Oakden feels that that would be a very great shame.

Dr. Oakden very much endorses Mr. Sutton's request to me for my assistance, which is why I am raising the matter in the House. I want the Minister to give me some indication of how he may be able to help this novel service in the light of a Bill that endorses the competence and public stature of osteopathy—which, as I said, I warmly welcome——

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend is telling us about the provision of osteopathy in a particular area. I shall look into the matter, but it has precious little to do with the Bill, which is about the regulation and recognition of the profession. There is a certain cross-over, but, in essence, my right hon. Friend is talking about choices made by local health authorities or family health services, authorities about the provision of osteopathy in a particular area.

Mr. Jopling: I understand that, and I am grateful for the Minister's comment. When the Bill reaches the statute book—as we all hope it will—it will mean a greater recognition of the competence of osteopaths and, as a direct consequence, there will be much more demand for such services within the national health service. I am glad to see the Minister nodding.

I have had a response from the Cumbria family health services authority, with which I had taken up the issue. The authority tells me that, when the Government introduced the general practitioner contract in 1990, part of that contract allowed for the development of health promotion activity in general practice. Included under the umbrella of health promotion activity was a degree of flexibility, allowing general practitioners and the family health services authorities to develop services which, in the widest sense, could be classed as health promotion, as well as more usually accepted activities such as screening and the prevention of heart disease.

In 1991, the family health services authority was approached by the Windermere practitioners who proposed the plan. Everyone, including the FHSA, understands how effective it can be. The FHSA has pointed out that the Department of Health, in consultation with the professions, has decided that health promotion in general practice should be refocused to emphasise the aspirations set out in the White Paper "The Health of the Nation".

In agreement with the British Medical Association and other representative bodies, the Department has proposed a new system of remuneration for health promotion activity which aims to remunerate practices for providing programmes designed to lower the incidence of heart disease and strokes in the community.

If, as a consequence of the Bill, we find a much greater demand for the services of osteopaths, it is important that the Department of Health and the FHSAs recognise that many worthwhile projects, including the project in Windermere to which I have referred, should develop in the future.

To that end, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the situation that I have explained to him. I will send him the correspondence, as I heard only a few days ago from the FHSA. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for offering to look into the matter, because this is an exciting new way in which the services of osteopaths can be made available. I commend the experience in my constituency to the House and to the Minister. I hope that those services will not have to be closed down as a result of Government policy, as it affects the way in which FHSAs carry out their business.

On that note, I am delighted to endorse the Bill and to wish it well.

12.56 pm

Lady Olga Maitland: I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on steering the Bill through to the statute book. His tremendous effort will be justified by the results.

I want also to congratulate the King's Fund on its report on osteopathy, which helped to set the Bill on the road. The inquiry was chaired so ably by Sir Thomas Bingham and was given a tremendous kick start by the Prince of Wales, who has never made a secret of his temendous faith and belief in the efficacy of osteopathy. Indeed, he sought osteopathic treatment for his broken arm.

The Prince of Wales is well aware of the effect of crippling pain. In 1979, crippling pain led to the loss of 11·5 million working days. More recent figures show that 230,000 people are off work every working day of the year as a result of back pain.

It has always been a tragedy in the past that patients would hobble in agony to the doctor, then waste valuable time before it occurred to them to go to an osteopath. Three sessions with an osteopath could have cured misery which more conventional medicines were unable to help or relieve.

The Bill is long overdue. There have been six attempts since 1931 to introduce legislation on the matter. The last attempt was in December 1991, when Lord Walton of Detchant introduced a Bill in the other place. It was significant that he was so effective, because he is a past president of the General Medical Council. The General Medical Council's support for the osteopathy profession is a sign of the enormous step that it has taken towards general acceptance. Therefore, the Bill marks a coming of age.

There has been debate about the use of the terms "complementary medicine" and "alternative medicine". Now it is clear that osteopathy is truly complementary to conventional medicine. No longer will it be regarded as a fringe source of help. It will truly be part of the mainstream of the medical world. It is significant that more and more GPs refer patients to osteopaths. That is certainly a tremendous improvement on what happened in the past, when a GP would stand almost in pain of professional death if he dared to recommend a patient to another medical profession.

I sought advice from osteopaths in my constituency. They are enthusiastic about the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to an osteopath in his constituency.

Mr. Jopling: He was a disaster.

Lady Olga Maitland: There was another osteopath in my right hon. Friend's constituency. I am not talking about the one who was a disaster.

I spoke to Mr. Midgley in my constituency. He made some relevant points about the Bill, and said that at long last there will be real regulation and standards. He felt very keenly that rogue professionals could attempt some very delicate work and either misdiagnose or create general harm

Osteopathy is the mechanical treatment of the body. It concentrates on the manipulation of sensitive joints and tendons. Enormous damage can be done if a practitioner is poorly trained or, indeed, untrained. Severe manipulation can result in spinal fractures or even paralysis. That applies in particular to people who suffer from osteoporosis or thinning of the bones.

Similarly, it was pointed out to me that someone suffering from secondary cancers, for example, would suffer if the osteopath were unable to read X-rays. By reading X-rays, an osteopath is able to pick up abnormalities and make recommendations to other forms of medicine. It is terrifying that some osteopaths have abused their patients' trust. Thanks to the enormous work that has gone into the Bill, there will be rigorous standards and a proper register, which will eliminate the dark horses.

It is very interesting that not only have general practitioners accepted the importance of osteopaths but budget-holding GPs have made advances in using osteopathic services. Non-budget-holding GPs may employ the services of an osteopath, particularly if the family health services authority agrees. It is very much a matter of professional judgment.

There are now more than 2,000 practitioners of osteopathy, and the number is increasing. The number advertising their services in my area in Sutton, which covers the whole of south-west London, runs to nearly three pages in the "Yellow Pages". It is estimated that more than 100,000 people seek osteopathic advice each week. The success rate is worth taking into account. In 1989, a MORI poll revealed that 83 per cent. of users were satisfied with their treatment. As the number of osteopaths and their patients increases, the need for consumers to be protected by statutory regulation will increase, as will the satisfaction rate.

The Bill is welcome, because at present any person can set himself up with just a notice on the door. Now the suitability of osteopaths will be carefully examined, and they will have to undergo rigorous training, as we discussed in considerable detail earlier. That is important. The law of negligence insists that osteopaths should be fit and competent and it places on them a duty of care. In the absence of an accepted level of training, it is not clear what the accepted standards are. It is important that we get the standards absolutely right.

There are nine voluntary bodies that osteopaths can join. The principal organisation is the general council and the register of osteopaths, which has about 1,400 members. However, as the Bingham report said, those bodies have no effective sanctions to enforce minimum standards of education, training or competence. That is why I commend the Bill on putting all those matters right.

The Bill also breaks new ground in professional registration by taking powers to suspend osteopaths immediately when the public are thought to be at risk. It also provides the power to impose conditions so that the right people can re-enter the profession after a period of suspension, provided that they have reached the appropriate standards.

Mention was made of the relief given to back pain sufferers and many other patients by osteopaths. I wish to make one special plea. We have broken important new ground. The time has come to give the profession support in providing research facilities. Research into osteopathy has largely been ignored over the years, simply because the practitioners never had the resources to undertake serious research. Research was always done by rule of thumb. I feel that medical research and resources for it will be forthcoming now that the osteopathic profession is fully

[Lady Olga Maitland]

recognised and part of the main stream. If the profession is to develop with the energy, enterprise and innovation that it has shown so far, it needs that extra back-up.

I believe that the Bill will set osteopaths new horizons and a new future. I join all hon. Members in commending the path of the Bill so far. I wish it good luck in another place.

1.7 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has received some glowing compliments during the debate from hon. Members, including the Minister and the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who speaks for the Opposition. He thoroughly deserves all of them. The hon. Member for Bristol, South expressed the fear that the questioning to which my hon. Friend was subjected this morning might have, to use her phrase, "marred the experience" for him. I thought, rather the reverse.

The great ability with which my hon. Friend dealt with all the questions this morning will have even further enhanced his standing and reputation as a great expert in this field. He showed great dexterity in handling the House. The Bill will be a considerable personal achievement for him and one for which he will be remembered by the profession and its patients for a long time.

In the proceedings on Report I expressed a few pesonal reservations about detailed aspects of the Bill. However, I welcome the Bill. It addresses the essential problem of the lack of credibility which osteopaths have suffered in the past. It has been impossible for the public to distinguish between competent and incompetent osteopaths. There have been too many stories of the type which my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) told us earlier.

I have no doubt that a clearly defined register of osteopaths and clearly established standards on their qualification, training and education will greatly enhance the credibility of that profession. Those changes will also make it much easier for medical practitioners to refer their patients to osteopaths because they will know that those osteopaths are registered and qualified. There will be no ambiguity about that. That may even make it easier for fund-holding practices to contract with osteopaths under the Government's new rules. It has already been suggested that that may become an ever more frequent practice in the future. Those changes will, above all, greatly increase the confidence of patients when they put themselves in the hands of osteopaths.

A Bill that serves, at the same time, the interests of patients, practitioners of osteopathy and the good health of the nation represents a useful day's work. I add my tributes to those paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East for having made that possible.

1.10 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not intend to delay the House, but I could not resist the temptation to add my voice to those who have expressed their admiration for the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), who specifically asked me not to do so. The temptation, therefore, became irresistible.

The Bill is a superb example of how a private Member's Bill should be run. As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, it is a complicated Bill and one which does not come directly within the knowledge of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Moss: It does now.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: After Committee and Report, my hon. Friend has certainly mastered this complex issue. The Bill will greatly enhance the standing of the osteopathy profession and that of my hon. Friend.

In Committee and on Report, we have considered the clauses in great detail. I do not need to go over the ground that we have covered, but I have one word of caution in my general welcome to the Bill. We have given the general council an enormous amount of discretion, more discretion than I should like, as was apparent from my earlier remarks.

I hope that the confidence that the House has expressed about the ability of those who will serve on the general council to fulfil the onerous duties that are being put on them, will be fully justified. I wish them well, and I hope that the profession of osteopathy will thrive. I have personal experience of osteopaths and I know that, for several more years at least, I shall have dire need of one. I hope that the profession will benefit from what we have done today.

1.12 pm

Mr. Moss: I am most grateful for the kind comments of my hon. Friends and those of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who served on the Committee. I thank the hon. Lady and our absent friends from the Liberal Democrats who gave the Bill all-party support at all stages.

I do not wish to detain the House, because I know that other hon. Members are itching to deliberate on the Hedgerows Bill. I feel that I have been dragged through several, such has been the detailed examination of the Bill that I have had to endure this morning. It has, however, been to good effect.

I extend my thanks to the King's Fund working party for providing the framework for the Bill. It is a tribute to its dedication and firmness. I also extend my thanks to the osteopathic profession for its encouragement. I should also like to thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who, in his previous capacity as Secretary of State for Health, was instrumental in making it possible for the profession to take matters forward.

I congratulate those who served on the Committee, and I thank them for their efforts. I pay tribute to Simon Fielding for his personal commitment and dedication in seeking to acquire statutory regulations for his profession. I also thank officials of the Department of Health, whose contributions have been invaluable.

I wish the Bill a speedy passage through the other place, where Lord Walton has agreed to take it on. I hope that their Lordships do not wish to amend the Bill, which has already been amended and has 42 clauses. I think that we have done the job properly, and I look forward to the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Hedgerows Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

EXTENT OF PROTECTION

'.A hedgerow is not protected if it does not exceed twenty metres in length unless it forms a junction with another hedgerow at each end.'.—*[Mr. Clifton-Brown.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewksbury): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 33, in clause 1, page 1, line 5, leave out 'where the conditions in subsection (2) below are satisfied'.

No. 34, in clause 1, page 1, line 12, leave out subsection (2).

No. 53, in clause 13, page 8, line 30, at end insert—

'(7A) This Act only applies to a hedgerow if—

(a) it is on or adjacent to land used for agriculture or forestry or is on common land, protected land or a golf-course or racecourse, and

(b) either it is 20 metres or more in length or its continuity is broken at each end by a junction with another hedgerow.

(7B) Regulations may amend the length referred to in subsection (7A)(b) above'.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill was debated at great length in Committee, when we had four sittings and discussed it in detail. We are to discuss it further today. Amendment No. 5, which is extremely important, was debated in Committee and withdrawn. It is a great disappointment to all Conservative Members, who wish to ensure that the Bill is workable for those who have to implement it, that amendment No. 5, ensuring that agricultural needs are taken into account—surely, a primary need—has not been selected. I appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to consider selecting that most important amendment, even at this late stage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may appeal, but he will not be successful.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to draw your attention, to another aspect of Madam Speaker's selection of amendments—amendment No. 15. At present, it is listed with amendment No. 42. While you may care for a few more minutes to consider the matter before giving your judgment, when you look carefully, you will see that it has been wrongly grouped with amendment No. 42. It falls more naturally with amendments Nos. 44 and 45, to which it relates. You may care to consider the matter for a few minutes as the debate proceeds and state later whether you agree. It would be for the convenience of the House if you could do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall give consideration to the matter and give my judgment in a few minutes.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), Mr. Deputy Speaker. If he can find some method—in order, of course—of obliquely referring to the problem, I might be able to give some helpful guidance.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In view of what the Minister has said, may I renew my plea that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should consider calling amendment No. 5 for us to debate at an appropriate moment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that I cannot give further consideration to that issue.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: When debating new clause 1 it is essential to discuss how we have arrived at this stage. We had some lengthy and detailed discussions of the Bill in Committee. It might be thought that the concept of hedgerows is a simple one and that to draft a Bill to preserve a hedgerow might be a relatively easy task. However, once we began to discuss the details of drafting such a Bill, we understood how complicated some of the aspects were—as we shall no doubt discover later today.

In Committee, we examined clause 6 in great detail, as it was almost unintelligible as drafted. I shall remind the House of what the original clause 6 was designed to achieve. The Bill provides for someone to notify the local authority if he or she wishes to remove a hedgerow on specified grounds. The local authority then has to decide within 28 days whether to issue a notice preventing removal of the hedgerow. Then there are the usual appeal procedures, after which an enforcement notice may be issued and people can appeal to the Secretary of State to have the notice revoked in whole or in part.

The amendment to clause 6 tabled in Committee was designed to impose de minimis requirements for hedgerow length. It sought to remove the cover provided by the Bill for all hedgerows under 20 m. The problem was that it was drafted in such a convoluted way that the Committee could not agree to it and decided to chuck it out, leaving us with the problem that the Bill now covers every single shrub in every field in the country.

We spent almost a whole sitting debating whether small bits of urban hedgerows should be brought within the scope of the Bill and we decided, given the burdens that that would impose on local authorities, that the Bill would become unworkable if we included those bits. If we include all hedgerows under 20 m the same will happen.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Can my hon. Friend confirm that a minimum of 20 m is at least consistent? That was the very distance included in the report to the Department of Environment by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, as the minimum length of boundary to be classified as a hedge.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Indeed. The new clause also specifies 20 m—a sensible length, and hedgerows less than 20 m should not be protected. If we start protecting tiny bits of hedgerow, the measure will become over-bureaucratic and an administrative nightmare for local authorities.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): In my urban constituency there are many little hedgerows around golf courses, behind parks and surrounding all sorts of public buildings. Surely they, too, deserve protection, even though they are not 20 m long?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That backs up what I have been saying. In Committee, we decided that however worthy these small bits of hedgerow might be, bringing them within the scope of the Bill would wreck it, because it would become unworkable and over-bureaucratic. Local authorities would be swamped by thousands of inquiries about the hedges in people's gardens.

We must try to make the Bill workable, particularly for the agricultural community, on which the major burden will fall. My new clause is a s. . .le way round the problem. It exempts all hedges under 20 m unless they form an H-type junction between two other hedgerows.

Amendments Nos. 33, 34 and especially No. 53 go a long way towards meeting my anxiety and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) for that. I submit, however, that new clause 1 is a far better way forward.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall try to be brief, because brevity is necessary if the Bill is to be enacted. I strongly support the Bill although its promoter is aware that I regard it as inadequate. However, the situation in Britain is such that a Bill of this sort is desperately needed.

The Government have proclaimed their support for the Bill in recent months and have used it as evidence of the green commitment of the Conservative party. There is not much of a commitment in evidence today, as Member after Member is queuing up to stop the Bill becoming law. I trust that the Conservative party will shelve any claim to green virtue.

If the Bill is to have any chance at all, Conservative Members will have to withdraw their amendments or merely move them formally. If they do not do that but drag out the time of the House to prevent the Bill from becoming law, they will have added shame to the ignominy of their record on this matter over the past 15 years.

The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) says that his new clause is designed to allow the removal of 20 m hedgerows, but Conservative Members are trying to make sure that the Bill does not provide protection for any hedgerow. I will give one example of why the new clause is undesirable. Many short hedgerows would probably have been removed in the past 15 years or more if they did not serve a purpose, so extensive has the destruction of hedgerows been. If a 20 m hedgerow contained a rare species of flora or fauna there would be no opportunity to ensure its survival.

Some species of flora in our country can be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and if the last half dozen of a plant species is contained in a 20 m hedgerow, that species would eradicated because the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury does not think that any 20 m stretch of hedgerow is worth keeping.

Mr. Jopling: If the flora were as important as the hon. Gentleman suggests, it is more than likely that its habitat would be protected as a site of special scientific interest. That is a much more satisfactory way to preserve our heritage of flora. Flora and fauna as important as the hon. Gentleman describes would be better preserved by means of an SSSI than by rejecting the amendment.

Mr. Hardy: In an ideal world the right hon. Gentleman would be perfectly right, but has he not studied the number of sites of special interest that have been destroyed in recent decades? The number is well over 1,000, and probably over 2,000 or 3,000. Those who are interested in conservation welcome the conferring of the status of SSSI on a specific habitat, but they have no confidence that under this Administration such habitats enjoy any protection at all. What the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have been about this morning is further evidence that while the Conservatives are in office, Britain's ecological inheritance is very much under threat.

I welcome the fact that the Government have supported the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) in his attempt to get this inadequate measure on to the statute book, but I deplore the tactics adopted by Conservative Members who have tabled amendment after amendment, all of them designed to do nothing other than to remove any meaning from hedgerow protection.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has wasted enough of my time this year already.

If Conservative Members wish to understand why the Conservative party is unpopular, they should consider the vast number of discreditable amendments that they have tabled. I sought hedgerow protection through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 when it was being debated, but I was blocked by the Government. After that, I tabled a number of hedgerow Bills, the first of them in 1982. In 1982, the Government said that we did not need a hedgerow protection Bill because destruction had virtually stopped. Since then we have lost 100,000 miles of hedgerow and the Government have sat by year after year, watching.

1.30 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No I will not give way, for the same reason that I would not give way to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). I am not often discourteous, but I am discourteous about hedgerows because I have every reason to be angry.

In 1987, I was on the council of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. I went to King's Cross station on the day that the RSPB celebrated its centenary to see a railway engine named Avocet to commemorate that anniversary. The guest speaker was the then Mrs. Thatcher, who made a speech in which she said that it was deeply regrettable that 130,000 miles of hedgerow had disappeared in Britain over the past three decades. She called for hedgerows to be protected. I left that gathering to come to the House to present yet another Bill on hedgerows. On the Friday of the following week, when I sought Second Reading for that Bill, the Government blocked it—on the orders of that right hon. Lady.

I had hoped that the Government had learnt some sense as some Ministers were saying, "Yes, we need to be green; we need to protect hedgerows." Hence, the hon. Member for Surrey, East was able to present his Bill when it was drawn near the top of the ballot and I understood that the Government would support it. However, they were not keen to encourage their Back Benchers to support it. I ask those hon. Members who are responsible for so many of the amendments to have some regard to the position of their Government and the efforts of their hon. Friend and to withdraw their amendments so that the Bill has a chance. If they do not do so, it will fall, we shall have to try again and small hedgerows——

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) has made a disgraceful slur on Conservative Members, but he will not give way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is up to the hon. Member making the speech whether he wishes to give way, and the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) knows that. That is not a point of order for me. It is an abuse of the procedures of the House.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury delayed us a great deal in Committee and we listened to him with courtesy. I regret that the lack of time —time is an important factor—does not justify my giving way.

If the new clause is not withdrawn and if Conservative Members do not withdraw the rest of the amendments, or at least ensure that they are debated briefly, it will be not merely 20 m or shorter hedgerows which continue to be destroyed at an excessive pace, but all other hedgerows. I trust that they will not wish to bear the consequences of their irresponsibility, because it would be irresponsibility if they allowed the Bill to fall and more thousands of miles of hedgerows to go.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No, for the reasons that I have already given. I want to be brief. I said that I would not delay the Bill, and I am conscious of the fact that the hon. Member for Surrey, East may be feeling restive about the scale of my support.

If Conservative Members wish to maintain any reputation for green concern, they should not continue along the route that they have so far adopted. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who has already referred to his osteopath, has a high reputation for the work that he did as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to secure environmentally sensitive area status. That was an important step. I am amazed that the reputation that he developed is being squandered by his support for amendments and new clauses designed to continue the damage and destruction of the rural and natural heritage of our land.

Mr. Jopling: I am extremely disappointed with the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). He and I have had a good many associations over the years, including one particular association in defence, and I am sorry that he should have acted as he did.

The hon. Gentleman began his speech by saying that there was not very much time to deal with the Bill—we have only 76 minutes to deal with a lengthy Report stage —so to take 10 of those 76 minutes himself is a bit rich.

I declare an interest as I am a farmer and a member of both the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to refer to my work in creating environmentally sensitive areas. Indeed, I was the first Minister to make public money available for the planting of new hedgerows. I am proud of that.

I declare my interest even more fully by informing the House that I have several miles of hedgerow on my farm. During the past year or two we have allowed most of the roadside hedgerow to grow upwards by several feet, as recommended by the conservation bodies, to encourage wildlife in the hedges. The hon. Gentleman is most welcome to come to my farm and see what we have tried to do, both by making our hedgerow bigger and thicker and by encouraging wildlife through our conservation interest.

It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to take the position that he has. I am all for preserving hedgerows and making them better as wildlife habitats, but we must try to be fair. All the amendments to which I have put my name have been recommended by the NFU and CLA, in an attempt to make the Bill a fair balance between the natural desire of the overwhelming majority of farmers and landowners to preserve our heritage and hedgerows and the necessity to protect the livelihoods of many thousands of people. It is strange that the hon. Gentleman wanted their views to be swept away in 76 minutes, which is a wholly inadequate time for sensible discussion on an important Bill.

The hon. Gentleman rejected both new clause 1 and amendment No. 53 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth). In fact, I do not think that that amendment goes far enough and I hope that my hon. Friend will agree to withdraw it and also to accept new clause 1. We are attempting to make the Bill fair between those who wish to conserve and protect the countryside, and our hedgerows in particular, and those who see the countryside as their workshop and a means of livelihood for many thousands of people.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I want to rebut some of the comments that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) directed at me and some of my hon. Friends. First, I declare an interest as I am a member of both the Country Landowners Association and the British Field Sports Society. We place a high regard on hedgerows as an important reservoir for game conservation. It is important that the Bill should be seen to be fair. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) thought, no doubt, that this would be a simple matter, but it has turned out to be a very complicated matter because the British countryside is complicated and throws up many different problems which nobody envisaged when the Bill began its passage through Parliament.

Mr. Gill: As my hon. Friend said, these are very complicated matters. I have suggested to him in the past that when we legislate, the effect of the legislation that we pass is often the very opposite of that which was intended. He may be interested in the contents of an unsolicited letter that I have received from one of my constituents who, among other things, says:

> "I have embarked on a 2-3 years hedge planting programme . . . There could be no greater disincentive for me to complete what I already have in mind or even extend my existing programme than the prospect of a conservationist or bureaucrat cashing in on my efforts".

Mr. Atkinson: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is one of the problems with legislation of this kind. It persuades people, farmers in particular who have planted new hedges, that they will, as it were, be set in stone for ever and that no regard will be paid in future to the agricultural requirements of the farm.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): I can assure my hon. Friend that I never thought for one moment that this would be a simple matter. It is a complex matter. I agree with those hon. Members who have said as much.

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

However, that does not mean that this matter cannot be dealt with expeditiously, a point which I hope the House will bear in mind today. Can my hon. Friend tell me precisely what the points that he is addressing have to do with new clause 1?

Mr. Atkinson: I shall endeavour to be brief, but I thought that I ought to rebut some of the accusations that have been made. New clause 1 is about simplicity and clarity. That is what we are aiming for in the new clause. I do not intend to detain the House for much longer, but I want to rebut the criticisms of the hon. Member for Wentworth.

The whole debate has been clouded by lack of clarity —by people and pressure groups outside the House who have used the Bill as a method of embarking upon a campaign of farmer bashing. That is why the Bill is such a sensitive issue, a point which is highlighted in the publicity for the Bill. There have been allegations, repeated today by the hon. Member for Wentworth, that many miles of hedgerows have disappeared.

If the hon. Gentleman had taken the trouble to read the report of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology which was prepared for the Department of the Environment, he would have seen that it talks about the number of hedgerows that have been lost. When the institute talks about hedgerows having been lost, that does not mean that they have been grubbed up and wiped away. All it means is that there has been a change in the management regime for those hedgerows.

We know from the classifications in the report of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology that the classification of a "hedgerow" is one that is stockproof to sheep. If a farmer no longer keeps sheep and grows cereals, as many of them now do, there is no need for his hedgerows to be stockproof to sheep. They grow out and become more "gappy". Under the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology's classification, that does not amount to a hedgerow. Nevertheless, it is an important and valuable landscape feature in the countryside. It is not lost.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I am still slightly lost as to how this point relates to new clause 1. If my hon. Friend is interested in clarity, will he confirm that the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology figures suggest that some 12,300 miles of hedgerows were lost between 1984 and 1990, which amounts to an average of 2,000 miles every year, and that since the Bill was first introduced some 660 miles of hedgerows have been lost?

That equates roughly to the distance between London and John o' Groats. Would my hon. Friend like to comment on the ITE statistics?

1.45 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been rather lenient with hon. Members on both sides of the House who have spoken so far although they have been going wide of the new clause. If we can return to the new clause, it would help the debate.

Mr. Atkinson: Would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, give me a second's more latitude to reply to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East? He failed to understand or to hear what I said. The hedges are not lost, but simply moved to a different category. If my hon. Friend finishes reading the report and looks at paragraph 24, he will see that only 9·5 per cent. of hedges in that period were lost and that most of those were lost to urban development and to road building. The loss was not the responsibility of farmers, who have continued to plant more hedges.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the ITE report shows that over that period, the 12,300 miles to which his hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) referred were lost due to removal—not to neglect, to different management or to the creation of gaps? In addition, 37,100 miles were lost due to neglect. His hon. Friend was talking of the deliberate removal of hedgerows—the problem that the Bill seeks to redress.

Mr. Atkinson: At the risk of trying your patience further, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I shall endeavour not to —may I reply to the point made by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)? Neglect does not necessarily remove a valuable landscape feature. It simply means that a hedge is no longer kept to the standard of being stockproof for sheep. The fact that it can have gaps and that trees can grow enhances the value of the landscape. If the hon. Gentleman took the trouble to talk to people from organisations such as the Game Conservancy and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, he would be told that wildlife benefits from a variety of natural features. Those organisations do not want all the hedges to be neatly clipped and stockproof for sheep; they want a variety of features. I urge the House to support the new clause because it seeks clarity in at least specifying what is a hedgerow.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am dumbfounded. I understood that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, among others, very much wanted the Bill. Being acrimonious serves no purpose, but I have one point to make to the Minister. There is a general impression among interested people—there are a heck of a lot of those—that a new Member, the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth), has made a serious, competent and good-hearted attempt to introduce hedgerow legislation. For the past few months, I and many others have been under the impression that the Bill would have a safe passage, that debates would be no more than a formality and that the Bill had the Government's backing. Ministers give the impression on the airwaves that the Bill will be passed and I have even heard some of them take credit for the Bill. They say that of course they will do something about hedgerows. It is shameful that, after the efforts of the hon. Member for Surrey, East and others, the Bill will obviously not reach the statute book.

I intend to raise two issues on the new clause, the first of which is the question of very short hedgerows by the roadside. I quote my friend Dr. David Long of the botanic gardens in Edinburgh who says:

> "Hedgerows are not only still being grubbed out in southern Scotland . . . but are being insidiously killed by salt-spray (eg A68 south of Edinburgh) and over-zealously pruned to the extent that their value as shelter and food for birds is severely restricted. Polluters do not pay! When hedges are destroyed by car-accidents (also many places on A68) they are rarely restored, unlike walls."

There are many short hedgerows in this country. Are we saying that they are not worth keeping?

There is a strong argument for doing something about short hedgerows and for using the set-aside scheme to build up set-aside areas on the verges of many of our busier roads which we insist on salting.

Secondly, could we consider the question of hedges measuring less than 20 m in areas affected by opencast coal mining? I have a specific example in mind—the current cause celebre involving Bridge castle near Westfield, in my constituency. It is proposed that, over 82 weeks, some very beautiful countryside—the lungs of the small steel town of Armadale—should be dug up, along with the hedges and beech trees growing on it, so that tens of thousands of tonnes of coal can be mined.

Two issues arise from that. First, should opencast mining be allowed when it involves the destruction of hedges, some of them very old? Secondly, what is the country thinking of in allowing opencast mining in such areas, when we are at our wits' end trying to decide what to do with our deep-mined coal?

I hope that, as a former Scottish Whip, the Minister will bring the matter to the attention of the Scottish Office. It is not that West Lothian district council is either unwise or ill hearted; it is very likely to give permission, but I understand why. It is nothing to do with the council's judgment about hedges. Nearly all its members—incidentally, it is not Labour controlled—say that they are against the proposal. Why, then, do they think that they may allow it? The answer is simple: legal fees. Because of Government guidelines, the proposition strongly favours the developers. If the developers appeal, legal costs may well be awarded against the council—and lawyers do not come cheap; five or even six figures may be involved.

If hedges measuring less than 20 m are to be protected from the consequences of opencast mining, it must be done through a Bill such as this. Given the legal set-up, the fees involved and local authorities' presumption that they may have to pay costs, such hedges cannot be protected in any other way. I feel passionately about the matter, and I hope that the Minister will contact the Scottish Office on Monday morning.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The House may be relieved to learn that I do not intend to deal with all the wide-ranging points that have been made.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned Government support. The Department of the Environment has provided invaluable help, and its annual report contains a public statement of its support for the Bill. I pay tribute to the work of its officials, and to the assistance of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the attitude of Conservative Members. I believe that an overwhelming number of hon. Members on both sides of the House support the Bill. I know that a small minority do not; as is becoming clear today, it is a fact of parliamentary procedure—albeit, perhaps, a strange one—that a small minority of Members can damage private Members' Bills, but no one outside the House should be under any illusion about the commitment of the majority of Conservative Members to such legislation. I am also aware of the enormous support that the measures command in the country at large.

With reference to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, I have a letter from a number of groups interested in countryside matters, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, representing in total a membership of 2 million. The letter, which the RSPB has signed, states:

"We believe that the Hedgerows Bill is workable and fair. It would provide sound legislation to protect important hedgerows. It is a vitally important piece of legislation, which will contribute much to the protection of the countryside."

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Let me clarify what I said. I apologise if I implied that the RSPB was against the Bill. I realise that it supports the Bill. I merely said that it believed that variety of habitat was important to wildlife.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend was urging hon. Members to listen to what the RSPB had said: I am merely suggesting that he might do the same.

I have considerable sympathy with the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friends. The House will be aware of the dilemma that I have faced throughout our proceedings. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) thinks that the proposal does not go too far while other hon. Members, whose views have been well represented in our discussions, take the opposite view. I hope that we are steering a middle course. I have sympathy with the points that have been made.

I undertook in Committee to replace clause 6 with a simpler form of words that would still exempt hedgerows which, by virtue of their size and scale, could be regarded as de minimis. Amendment No. 53 is the result of that undertaking. It would have exactly the same effect as new clause 1. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said that his new clause 1 was better than the amendment, but did not attempt to say why. I think that the amendment is better because it is more concise in that it does not require the addition of a clause to the Bill and is tidier in the sense that it ensures that the description of the scope of the Bill will be entirely contained in clause 13. It also ensures that the Secretary of State has the power to change, by way of regulation, the specified length of 20 m, which I hope hon. Members will think is a help. I urge the House to accept the amendment and not new clause 1.

Mr. Chris Smith: We strongly support the Bill. I hoped at the start of today's proceedings that we might by now have been sending it on its way to the other place and that it would reach the statute book. The Opposition chose not to table any amendments on Report because we wanted the Bill to be considered expeditiously. We debated the Bill at length in Committee and felt that that debate had been sufficient.

The hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) has bent over backwards throughout to meet the concerns expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That is why we are happy to accept amendment No. 53 and the associated proposals. We proposed amendments of our own in Committee. It is no secret that we believe that the Bill does not go far enough. None the less, it is the best compromise that could be achieved. The amendments of the hon. Member for Surrey, East reinstate the de minimis 20 m provision which was broadly agreed by both sides in Committee.

Even if we accept those amendments and make more rapid progress on other amendments, I fear that it is the intention of some Conservative Members to ensure that the Bill is talked out today. I hope that in the final 30 minutes available for debate today they will think again

[Mr. Chris Smith]

about that, because some 40 miles of hedgerow disappear every week. That is a precious habitat and a crucial part of our landscape. The Bill will go a considerable way towards protecting some of that precious inheritance.

I hope that Conservative Members will not seek, for a variety of reasons best known to them, to ensure that the Bill does not reach the statute book. If they do that, they will have a very heavy conscience to bear in the coming months and years.

2 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It was interesting to hear allegations from the Opposition Front Bench and from Opposition Members that we are deliberately trying to talk the Bill out when Opposition Members have spoken for 17 of the 46 minutes that we have spent debating the Bill. We should bear that in mind.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the new clause.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

OFFENCE OF UPROOTING ETC. HEDGEROW

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 1, line 5, leave out 'where the conditions in subsection (2) below are satisfied'. —*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 6 after 'person', insert 'intentionally'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we may take amendment No. 35, in page 1, line 22 leave out from 'that' to the end and insert

'he took all reasonable measures to prevent the hedgerow being uprooted or destroyed or, as the case may be, the quality of the hedgerow being significantly impaired'.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am in error. I should have declared the fact that I am a farmer. Over the past 20 years, I have had a net gain on my farm of more than one mile of hedgerows. I would not like anyone to think that I do not have an excellent record on hedgerows. I am also a member of the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union and the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

Amendment No. 1 strikes at the heart of the Bill. What is the motive behind the proposal? The matter is highly subjective, but I submit that the local authority, when deciding whether to issue an enforcement notice under the Bill, should have to prove intent. It is a fundamental tenet of the criminal justice system that a person is innocent until proven guilty. It would be rather draconian for the Bill to reverse that trend.

As I said in Standing Committee, there is precedent for the word "intent" in other legislation. Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 includes the word "intent". It states that it is a substantial Act which covers many rural issues and it makes it an offence to damage "intentionally" the nest of a wild bird. Therefore, the concept of consent is understood by the courts and by the rural community. It would be an appropriate word to use in the Bill. There are other statutory precedents. The Badgers Act 1991, as consolidated by the 1992 legislation, contains the word "intent".

As for amendment No. 39, my hon. Friend the Minister has recognised that we must look carefully at what the intention was. Although he has not used the word "intent", he has come some way between the Bill as originally drafted and amendment No. 1. Amendment No. 1 is much fairer on the farming community, which will have to implement the Bill. Authorities, when deciding whether to issue an enforcement notice or proceedings against an offender, should have to prove intent, in common with all other tenets of the British justice system.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Again, I am sympathetic to the general point. It occurs to me that the notion of strict liability, which is incorporated in the Bill as it stands, seems somewhat harsh in the circumstances, but I cannot recommend to the House amendment No. 1, which would make it necessary to prove intent. It would be too difficult for successful prosecutions to be undertaken. It naturally follows that I believe that amendment No. 1 would severely impair the effectiveness of the Bill.

I have therefore brought forward amendment No. 35, which I commend to the House. It creates the defence of having taken all reasonable measures to prevent the destruction of or damage to a hedgerow. There is still the onus to take due care when working in the vicinity of hedgerows, but allowance is made in amendment No. 35 for cases of genuine accident to be argued.

That is a fair arrangement which will nevertheless retain the effectiveness of the Bill as a deterrent against the careless treatment of hedgerows. That is why I ask for amendment No. 1 to be withdrawn and for amendment No. 35 to be accepted.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 1, line 12, leave out subsection (2).

No. 35, in page 1, line 22, leave out from 'that' to the end and insert

'he took all reasonable measures to prevent the hedgerow being uprooted or destroyed or, as the case may be, the quality of the hedgerow being significantly impaired'.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Clause 2

PERMISSION BY NOTIFICATION

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 12, leave out

'(or work including the work)'

and insert 'or works'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 36, in page 2, line 12, leave out

'(or work including the work)'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 16, leave out

'(or work including the work)'

and insert 'or works'.

No. 37, in page 2, line 16, leave out

'(or work including the work)'.

No. 38, in page 2, line 34, after first 'work' insert

'specified in the notice under subsection (2)(a) above'.

Mr. Atkinson: When I tabled my amendment, I had not seen the amendment that was subsequently tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth). Hon. Members will remember that there was an effort to get some plain English into the Bill. I am glad

that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is present, because he has an enormous interest in this subject. We felt that the phraseology in clause 2

"to carry out the work"

and

"(or work including the work)"

was absolutely baffling. The farming community has to deal with some difficult and complicated forms, which I shall call IACS forms. They have set a good example of how to clarify a simple subject. I am glad that my hon. Friend's amendments simplify the Bill to make it better understood by those who will have to live with it should it become law. Having seen the other amendments, I do not propose to push amendment No. 2. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 2, line 12, leave out '(or work including the work)'.

No. 37, in page 2, line 16, leave out '(or work including the work)'.

No. 38, in page 2, line 34, after first 'work' insert 'specified in the notice under subsection (2)(a) above'.

Mr. Jopling: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 37, leave out from 'are' to end of line 40 and insert 'that—

(a) the hedgerow makes a significant contribution to the landscape,

(b) the hedgerow is of significant historic interest, and

(c) the hedgerow is of significant value as a habitat for plants or animals.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 39, in page 2, line 37, at end insert 'that in the opinion of the local planning authority it is of significant value by reason of'.

Mr. Jopling: I notice that the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who spoke for 15 minutes in the earlier debate, are no longer with us. I do not intend to keep the House for long. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) who is promoting the Bill, will accept what I regard as important amendments to clause 2(4), which deals with some of the criteria that should be used when a local authority decides whether any alteration to a hedgerow should be made.

As the Bill is drafted, it is all rather bald, if I may use that phrase. It says that the grounds to be considered are

"(a) the contribution of the hedgerow to the landscape,

(b) the historic interest of the hedgerow, and

(c) the value of the hedgerow as a habitat for plants and animals."

I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that any hedgerow makes a contribution to the landscape in the same way as any hedgerow that has existed for more than a year or two could be said to have an historic interest if it appears on a map from earlier times, however recent.

Of course, it could be said that any hedgerow has value as a habitat for plants and animals. I cannot think of a hedgerow anywhere that is not sometimes a habitat for plants and animals. We must be a little more specific. Amendment No. 4 adds the word "significant". We should fine down the definition so that the more important hedgerows are preserved and the bureaucratic process for the preservation of hedgerows is not embarked upon unless the hedgerows make some significant contribution, have some significant historic interest or are of significant value as a habitat for plants and animals.

It is essential that we strengthen the Bill. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East has tabled an amendment to meet the point, but he will agree that the words that he proposes in his amendment No. 39, which we are also discussing in this group, are not so clear as the ones that we have proposed. He proposes that we should use the opinion of the local planning authority on whether the hedgerow is significant. I speak as a former member of a planning authority in North Yorkshire. I should be the first to admit, and anyone who has served on a planning authority would be forced to agree, that sometimes the opinions of planning authorities are somewhat eccentric. Often one can make comparisions between one planning authority which agrees to one thing and another which would turn it down.

We want to create greater uniformity in the treatment of hedgerows. Therefore, the less that we talk about the opinion of planning authorities and the more that we write into the Bill that the contribution, interest or value of the habitat should be significant in the broader sense, the better. That brings me back to my earlier comments about the importance of making provisions for the preservation of hedgerows fair to everyone—those who are principally concerned with conservation and those who are principally concerned about using the countryside as a workshop and a means of livelihood.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: My right hon. Friend is a highly distinguished former member of the Cabinet and former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He will be as aware as anyone in the House of the value of guidance notes that accompany legislation. Why does he not think that, in this case, guidance notes will provide the suitable background against which local authorities may take their decisions?

2.15 pm

Mr. Jopling: I always prefer to see an undertaking included in a Bill rather than in guidance notes that emanate from a Department. The House legislates in a far better manner if it makes it clear in a Bill what it wants rather than leaves it to some sort of guidance that comes filtering out from Departments. I often find that such guidance does not clarify the situation. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will agree to the amendment, which is a significant improvement on his amendment No. 39. I should be most grateful if he could accept it.

Mr. Maclean: I had not intended to speak much in this debate because my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) has made an excellent job of masterminding the Bill through the House and there is no real job for me to do. I should like to make a brief contribution, however, about guidance notes.

As with any new legislation, the guidance issued by the Secretary of State on the interpretation of the Hedgerows Bill will be extremely important. I intend that that guidance will be comprehensive and I intend it to cover many aspects of the forthcoming Act. As I said in Committee, I do not want those guidance notes to comprise a couple of flimsy pages; I want them to make a good, readable tome—a best seller—on all aspects of hedgerow management.

Mr. Hardy: In that guidance will the Minister make clear what was confirmed in Committee: that the Bill in no

[Mr. Hardy]

way weakens the protection afforded by enclosure legislation, where specific requirements were laid down for the preservation of hedgerows?

Mr. Maclean: I did not intend to include that confirmation in the guidance, but there would be no harm in repeating what we said so often in Committee—the Bill has no connection with that previous legislation.

Three important areas would be covered by the guidance, including the landscape, wildlife and historic criteria and the system for applying those when making judgments on hedgerows notified to local authorities. That guidance would also include the importance of viewing the notified hedgerow in the context of all the hedgerows and, for example, the importance of taking into account the relevance of recently planted hedgerows for the landscape and wildlife value of surrounding hedgerows.

We intend to take the views of experts on the countryside and go out to consultation. We have started that process and we will continue it as we develop the criteria into a system for application. We will undertake a trial of any such system. I therefore believe that there will be plenty of opportunity for informed and interested parties to play a role in developing the guidance.

We also intend that the guidance will address what exactly is likely to be covered by the term, proper management of a hedgerow. I hope that that will take into account different management practices in different parts of the country. I do not just hope that; I intend that it shall.

The guidance notes will also need to give advice on planting and replacements with respect to any duty to reinstate a hedgerow. We considered this matter in Committee and it is important that we cover it in the guidance. In particular, that guidance should emphasise that appropriate species should be chosen when replacing a hedgerow in replanting. It would also need to make it quite clear that one should not expect a farmer to replace a hedgerow with large hedgerow-grown container plants or large shrubs. That may seem self-obvious to all hon. Members, but the matter was raised in Committee and I should like to nail it once and for all. The list is by no means exhaustive, but I hope that it will help to reassure hon. Members that we recognise the important role that guidance can play, and intend it to be comprehensive and to cover all those items that it would be inappropriate to place in the Bill.

I say to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that the Government have attempted to give all possible help, within the lines of propriety, to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East. I have repeatedly said that we support the Bill. However, the Bill is complex, and we found some more complexities as we analysed it in Committee. I respect the right of hon. Members to table amendments and improve the Bill. My hon. Friend sensibly tabled amendments which I commend to the House—it is now a far better Bill than it was initially. One thing that I cannot do in relation to a private Member's Bill, even as a former Whip and even when I support the Bill, is to try to whip hon. Members on either side of the House to support it, as that would be quite inappropriate.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Accusations have been made about Conservative Members. It should therefore be made clear that nearly every time amendments were tabled, my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) then drafted another amendment designed to make a compromise between the Bill as originally drafted and other hon. Members' amendments. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for doing that. We were not merely trying to waste time by tabling the amendments.

Mr. Chris Smith: If that is so, in the next five minutes will the hon. Member accept all the amendments tabled by his hon. Friend to meet the issues that he and his hon. Friends have raised so that the Bill can go on its way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but amendment No. 4, which I am about to discuss, is the fundamental amendment. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East would accept that his Bill was not designed to protect every hedgerow, but only specific categories of hedgerow. Any well-meaning person would accept that. The Bill was designed to protect hedgerows of historic value or of value to the landscape or with significant habitat qualities, and it is in that spirit that I wish to speak to the amendment.

We want to make the Bill as clear as possible for all those who are asked to implement it and for local authorities who are asked to police it. I accept my hon. Friend the Minister's assurance that the issues will be covered in the guidance—we had many similar discussions in Committee—but I believe that amendment No. 4 clarifies what is expected and I urge hon. Members to consider it carefully.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I have listened with great care to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), my hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), and I have been more persuaded by the arguments of my hon. Friend the Minister than by those of my other hon. Friends.

It has always been my intention to protect only those hedgerows that are of value—I never intended my Bill to protect all hedgerows. It was in response to the unease expressed by some of my hon. Friends in Committee, who felt that the Bill would not achieve that aim, that I tabled amendment No. 39.

I submit that amendment No. 39 has precisely the same effect as amendment No. 4 and I urge hon. Members to consider the role of the guidance notes to which the Minister has referred. On that basis, I urge the House to reject amendment No. 4 in favour of amendment No. 39.

As for the wider issue, the tabling of amendments, I do not for one moment suspect that the amendments that have been so persistently tabled in Committee and on Report are ill intentioned. It is true, as the Minister said, that the Bill has emerged a better Bill as a result of the close scrutiny exercised by hon. Members with differing points of view, and I am grateful to those who have played a constructive role in bringing the legislation thus far.

Nevertheless, we have to accept that the amendments tabled for today will ensure that the Bill fails at this stage. I thank all who have been involved and, in view of the enormous support for the Bill in the country and the House, I stress that this is not the end of the road for hedgerows. We now have the basis for some excellent legislation to protect Britain's most valuable hedgerows, and I still look forward to the day when the legislation will be in place to do that important job.

Mr. Jopling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his generous comments. Although I strongly prefer amendment No. 4 to amendment No. 39, I recognise that on this and other occasions my hon. Friend has done his best to meet our points. I am therefore perfectly happy to withdraw amendment No. 4 on the understanding that the House agrees to amendment No. 39.

I recognise that 76 minutes is far too short a time properly to deal with an important Bill of this sort, to which 14 groups of amendments have been tabled, and it was inevitable that the Bill would not complete its Report stage in view of the shortage of time.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 39, in page 2, line 37 at end insert

'that in the opinion of the local planning authority it is of significant value by reason of'.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Clause 5

CATEGORIES OF PERMITTED WORK

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 4, line 40 at end insert—

'(bb) uprooting or otherwise destroying, or significantly impairing the quality of, a stretch of hedgerow for the purpose only of carrying out remedial work to a ditch,'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 40, in page 4, line 46 leave out from 'hedgerow' to 'and' in line 48 and insert

'for the purpose only of protecting any crops growing on adjacent land from any pests or diseases injurious to them'.

No. 31, in page 4, line 48 after 'land', insert

'or livestock depastured on that land,'.

No. 9, in page 4, line 48 after 'land', insert—

'(dd) uprooting or otherwise destroying, or significantly impairing the quality of, a stretch of hedgerow which is harbouring pests that are causing serious damage to crops growing on adjacent land, or to livestock depastured on that land,'.

No. 30, in page 4, line 48 after 'land', insert—

'(dd) significantly impairing the quality of a stretch of hedgerow which is harbouring pests that are causing serious damage to crops growing on adjacent land, or to livestock depastured on that land,'.

No. 41, in page 5, line 5 at end insert—

'Regulations may make such amendments of section 6 of this Act as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or desirable in consequence of any provision made by virtue of subsection (2) above'.

No. 43, in clause 6, page 5, line 17, leave out from 'protecting' to end and insert

'any crops growing on adjacent land from any pests or diseases injurious to them'.

No. 56, in clause 15, page 10, line 7 at end insert—

'( ) "Pest" has the same meaning as in the Plant Health Act 1967'.

No. 27, in page 10, line 7 at end insert—

'(6A) "ditch" has the same meaning as in section 28 of the Land Drainage Act 1991.'.

No. 28, in page 10, line 13 at end insert—

'(7A) "Remedial work" has the same meaning as in section 28 of the Land Drainage Act 1991.'.

Mr. Atkinson: This great rack of amendments has to do with hedging and ditching. We believe that certain hedges or parts thereof should be capable of removal without the farmer being forced to go through the long and tedious process of notification. One aspect concerns clearing ditches in which shrubs can grow up. A second aspect concerns the removal of shrubs to protect crops and livestock from damage.

The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) go a considerable way in our direction in respect of diseases in hedges that can affect crops, but he has not dealt with the type of shrubs and hedges which can affect livestock. It is that on which I wish to concentrate.

Several plants and hedges can affect livestock—box-broom, laurel and yew are all poisonous to livestock. Under the Bill, a farmer who wanted to remove yew or broom from a hedge would have to go through the long and cumbersome process of notification. Our amendments deal with such matters as they affect livestock and I commend them to the House.

Drainage operations can be carried out fairly infrequently. In places such as the Somerset levels, the sides of drainage ditches become covered with hedges and shrubs which would ultimately become informal hedges. The problem with the Bill is that unless it is amended to allow drainage operations to proceed, farmers would be impeded and would have to go through the long process of notification before they could start clearing ditches.

It being half-past Two o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Bill to be considered what day? No day named.

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have witnessed the disgraceful spectacle of a small number of Conservative Back Benchers deliberately talking at length about the Osteopaths Bill and tabling a swathe of amendments to the Hedgerows Bill so as to ensure that the Hedgerows Bill will not reach the statute book although the Government support the Bill and it has enormous support outside the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman wish to make a point of order for the Chair?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. Will the Government ensure that Government time is made available for further discussion of this Bill? If that is not possible, can they include——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That still has nothing to do with the Chair. No doubt the Government will have noted the hon. Gentleman's comment.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

BAIL (AMENDMENT) BILL

As amended (in the Standing Committee) considered.
Order for Third Reading read.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

RIGHT TO KNOW BILL

Order for consideration read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Consideration deferred till Friday 14 May.

MEDICINES INFORMATION BILL

Order for further consideration read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Further consideration deferred till Friday 14 May.

VIDEO RECORDINGS BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

TRANSPLANTATION OF HUMAN ORGANS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

ENERGY (FAIR COMPETITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for adjourned debate on Second Reading [12 February]

Hon. Members: Object.
Debate further adjourned till Friday 14 May.

PENSIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

REGULATION OF WHEEL-CLAMPING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 10th May, the Motions in the name of Mr. John Smith relating to National Health Service may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock, at which time, unless those proceedings have been previously disposed of, the Speaker shall put the Question already proposed from the Chair.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

REINSURANCE (ACTS OF TERRORISM) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

REINSURANCE (ACTS OF TERRORISM) BILL

Ordered,

That, if the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that, as soon as the proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill [Money] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th May, the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion moved by Mr. James Arbuthnot on 2nd April relating to Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill not later than half-past Eleven o'clock or one and a half hours after the resumption of those proceedings, whichever is the earlier; and the said proceedings may continue after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Hon. Members: Object.
Debate adjourned till Monday next.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock be discharged from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Local Government (Touche Ross Report)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The passionate opposition to the Government's local government reform proposals in Scotland has more to do with the fact that decision making will be anaesthetised and local government paralysed for five years than it has to do with finance.

The subject of this Adjournment debate is the Touche Ross report on finance. I thought that it was prudent, sensible and well mannered last Friday, as soon as I knew of my luck in getting an Adjournment debate, to let the Government know precisely what I intended to ask, so I hope that their reply will be a considered reply to questions that they have had for a week.

I shall deal first with planning and economic development. Touche Ross has calculated that savings ranging from £58·4 million at the 51-unit level to £75·1 million at the 15-unit level can be made from planning and economic development.

Given that the Scottish Office calculation of grant-aided expenditure—GAE—for planning and economic development for 1992-93 for both regions and districts is £68·3 million net, will the Minister please explain several matters?

First, how can savings of £75·1 million be made from a combined region and district service costing a net £68·3 million?

Secondly, given that the present planning function is carried out by three islands, nine regions and 37 districts —a total of 49 councils in all—will the Minister please explain how savings of £58·4 million can be made by increasing the number of authorities from 49 to 51?

Thirdly, what are the estimated costs and the nature of the other costs included in this heading and are they normally charged to capital account?

Fourthly, will the Minister please explain how the new unitary planning function is expected to operate with fewer staff than existing regions have at present?

My second subject is library services. Touche Ross has postulated savings ranging from £7·4 million at the 51-unit level to £11·5 million at the 15-unit level for that service, which is presently administered by 41 authorities, and the GAE, as calculated by the Scottish Office, for 1992-93 is £76·1 million. Therefore, will the Minister please explain the following?

First, how can an increase in the number of library authorities from 41 to 51 produce savings of £7·4 million, almost 10 per cent. of the total cost?

Of the total costs for the library service of £76·1 million, it is estimated that £19 million relates to the replacement of books, and so on. The balance of £57·1 million relates to staff and property costs. Therefore, will the Minister please explain how a figure of £21·3 million from a total of £57·1 million—that is, 37 per cent.—could be described as non-operational, that is, managerial?

My third subject is housing. How is it estimated that the total supervision and management costs for the housing service on an all-Scotland basis for 1992-93 amounts to £150 million?

Will the Minister please explain how £38·7 million or 26 per cent. of this total is deemed by Touche Ross to be non-operational?

Fourthly—operational and non-operational costs—for the purposes of the study operational costs were excluded on the assumption that the same quality and quantity of service, together with the same management practices would continue.

The distinction between operational and non-operational staff is critical to the calculation.

What, therefore, is the breakdown by function of the operational staff and the non-operational staff estimated by Touche Ross reconciled to the total number of local government employees?

It is considered that that information should in fact be readily available.

Fifthly, on staffing structure, the postulated savings are based on a hypothetical model staffing structure for each service. Please supply this for each function, together with a full explanation of the assumptions used in formulating the model structures for the new unitary authorities.

Please explain why, in most options, unitary authorities have been assumed to require less administration and finance staff than existing regions.

Sixthly, on ongoing costs, please explain why Touche Ross treated the costs of information technology, democracy and early retirement pensions as purely transitional and not as ongoing, despite contrary advice from the DOE to the Local Government Commission for England.

Seventhly, on transitional cost—retirement/redundancy costs, Touche Ross has estimated the number of redundancy/early retirements to vary from 474 at the 51-unit level to 6,633 at the 15-unit level. The costs in year one similarly vary from £16·7 million to £110·4 million.

Given that 26 per cent. of local government employees are aged 50 or over, and given the experience of some English residuary bodies which suggests that redundancy/early retirement costs could be in the range 1·7 to 2·7 per cent. of revenue expenditure, amounting to £125 million to £200 million, please explain why the figures calculated by Touche Ross are so low.

Finally, on transitional costs—winding up existing authorities, the costs of winding up existing authorities is estimated by Touche Ross to be £88 million over five years before inflation, whereas experience elsewhere would indicate that expenditure on that item could amount to 3·7 per cent. of current expenditure, or £275 million.

As that figure is critical in the costs/savings equation, please say why the figure does not vary across the range of sizes and give the Scottish Office's own estimate of the cost of winding up existing authorities.

I gave notice of those question, and to ensure that the Minister has time to answer I shall now sit down.

2.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on his tenacity in obtaining this Adjournment debate. I listened with the greatest of interest to what he said. As he rightly told the House with his customary courtesy, a few days ago he provided me with a list of the questions that he intended to ask. I shall do my best to answer them.

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

First, I want to spend a moment or two spelling out the background to the Touche Ross report. Of course, the question of costs in the reform of local government in Scotland is of considerable importance. It has been argued that Touche Ross somehow got its figures wrong and that reform is therefore unaffordable and should not go ahead. There is no basis for those general criticisms and I shall explain why.

The first step that Touche Ross undertook was to gather detailed information about the current management structures in Scottish local authorities. Throughout the costing exercise, it has been assumed that the level and quality of services provided by local authorities would remain constant. It was therefore assumed that there would be no significant change in the numbers of staff directly involved in service delivery. Touche Ross and other commentators have therefore concentrated their analysis on the numbers of managerial and support staff, to which the hon. Gentleman's questions rightly refer.

Touche Ross employed consultants from the Institute of Public Finance to conduct a representative survey of local authorities to establish current management/staffing structures. That work was delayed for a time because of an initial refusal by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to co-operate, but finally that information was collected. It is worth pointing out that the survey is the only source of data on management structures across Scotland. Those commenting on the Touche Ross findings have either done so from the viewpoint of their own structure—or, in the case of consultants, the authorities for which they have been working—or have used the Touche Ross figures. Therefore, the Touche Ross figures have been invaluable in that respect.

Essentially, the approach involves comparing the cost of current staffing structures with those which the new authorities might be expected to develop. Because the number of teachers, social workers and others—what one might call the frontline troops—are likely to be unaffected by the boundaries of the new authorities, the methodology concentrates on management staff and other specialists whose jobs will be affected by the structure chosen.

If it is thought that the number of staff in the new structure will be fewer, allowance will have to be made for redundancy and early retirement payments. Similarly, if it is thought that additional staff will be required, the costs of recruitment will have to be included. These initial costs will then have to be compared with the longer term savings that will arise from having fewer staff in the new authorities, in order to arrive at a long-term estimate of the costs and savings arising from the reform.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Minister happy about the calculations for early retirement? The experience last time was that very many local government employees—often excellent local government employees—could not face up to the hassle of a different structure and therefore took early retirement. In other circumstances, they would have continued with their careers.

If there is another shake up, do the Government understand that many good people will say, "We've had enough. We're not going to live with yet another reorganisation, so we'll take early retirement."? That factor has not been taken into account by Touche Ross.

Mr. Stewart: It has been taken into account. However, the effect on staff morale of another reorganisation and how staff see their future careers developing is an important consideration. That is why I announced to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that we had decided to appoint a staff commission to look into these matters, and which will be the subject of the Bill that we hope to put before Parliament next Session.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) has done me the courtesy of coming to sit on the Opposition Front Bench. He is former chairman of COSLA. He knows that, commission or otherwise, the fact is that we have experience of what happened last time. And what happened then is likely to happen again. Talk to local authority employees. There is a great degree of fed-upness.

Mr. Stewart: We shall certainly learn from the experience last time, and from the particular experience last time when a large number of local authority employees found themselves doing essentially the same job within the new structure at substantially enhanced salaries. We shall certainly, under the capping regime, have controls that will affect that. I shall return later to the hon. Gentleman's detailed point, for it relates to the sixth point that he put to the House.

The methodology that the consultants have given us is a valuable tool. The responses to the consultation exercise suggest that it was a sensible approach. Why else, for example, should the City of Aberdeen district council, which is controlled by the Labour party, say, as I told the House on Wednesday, that

"the report is the only detailed study available of the likely costs of any reorganisation to a single-tier system . . . and accordingly the best use possible should be made of it. Many of the cost assumptions which can be checked have been shown not to be unreasonable, whilst further sensitivity analysis has been carried out."

The second task assigned to the consultant—the part that has generated most debate—was to use the methodology to estimate the possible costs of reform for each of the illustrative structures shown in the consultation paper. That refers more directly to the question that the hon. Member for Linlithgow asked. That task required Touche Ross to make a number of assumptions—for example, on the likely staffing structures of the new councils and on the level of redundancy and retirement payments on offer, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Clearly, no one knows at present what those detailed figures will be. That depends on the shape of the new map and it will be up to the new councils, when they are in place, to take decisions on their staffing levels. Thus, the concept of a right answer to the likely costs is essentially meaningless and generally acknowledged as such.

Before turning to the detailed questions asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, I must say that I believe that it was always not only inevitable, but desirable that once the Touche Ross estimates were known, others would react to them. That was precisely our intention in deciding to publish the Touche Ross figures—in full, I reassure the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—last October. The greater the body of evidence that became available—and it became available from a wide range of sources—the more likely we were to be able to assess the likely costs and savings arising from a particular structure. I must emphasise that such an approach implies no criticism of Touche Ross. Rather, it is an extension of its

work. By publishing the consultants' suggestions and by taking note of the comments made on them, we have sought to reach a balanced view of the costs and savings that may emerge.

In practice, our expectations about the likely response to the Touche Ross findings have been entirely borne out. Some people have criticised them as being over-optimistic, some as over-pessimistic. We have had useful discussions with local authority interests and we have had helpful input from professional bodies. All the evidence has been carefully weighed. To suggest, as some people have, that Touche Ross has got things "wrong" is deeply misleading and fails to give due credit to the excellent work of Touche Ross.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow first asked about planning and economic development. The Touche Ross category of planning and economic development also included many staff involved in property services, as well as architects, quantity surveyors and valuers. Those staff made up more than two thirds of the total category. The figures for that grouping are not, therefore, directly comparable with those shown for general aggregate expenditure purposes.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also asked about planning authorities and how savings could be made by increasing the number of planning authorities from 49 to 51. There are two answers to that question. First, for most of Scotland, moving to an unitary structure means moving from two sets of planners to one set of planners for an existing area. That is likely to lead to economies. Secondly, it does not seem unreasonable that the smaller authorities, implied by the 51-authority structure, might choose to combine similar departments, thus requiring fewer senior managers. That is a general point which the representations that we have received from regions have on the whole avoided and the representations that we have received from districts have generally emphasised. The hon. Member for Monklands, West will, of course, know of the positive reaction from his own area and of the belief by West Lothian district council that it could supply effectively and efficiently a whole range of services under a single-tier structure.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked about Library services. That is one of the matters that my officials are examining in the light of comments that have been made. It is worth noting, however, that libraries account for about 2 per cent. of total local authority expenditure: changes to the cost of that service are unlikely to have a marked effect on the overall costs of reform.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about housing. I am not sure of the basis for his figure of £150 million, but I can tell him that the figures quoted by Touche Ross represent 3.2 per cent. of the total budgeted expenditure on housing for 1992-93. I do not consider that to be an unreasonable level of management and administration spending.

The hon. Gentleman asked about operational and non-operational costs, and suggested that the information on that should be readily available. I assure him that it is readily available. The Touche Ross report shows the number of non-operational staff by function. As the hon. Member for Monklands, West will know, as a former chairman of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the total number of local authority employees according to function is available for the joint staffing watch survey, which is published by the Scottish Office and COSLA.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked me to supply the Touche Ross model staffing structures for each service. That information was passed to COSLA earlier this year, and I will arrange for him to receive a copy. He also asked why, in most options, unitary authorities have been assumed to require fewer administration and finance staff than existing regions. That takes us back to a point that I made earlier. It is, of course, a matter for the consultants, but I understand that they decided that the unitary authorities offered scope for rationalisation of some existing staffing structures. That is also the response of a number of individual local authorities of different political persuasions to the consultation exercise.

Mr. Dalyell: There will be a whole mosaic of joint boards. How will they be staffed, and who will pay for them? Has that been taken into account in the calculations?

Mr. Stewart: The consultation document mentioned the joint arrangements, but I do not accept that there will be a raft of joint boards; we have consistently said that there is a range of possibilities for joint arrangements under a new structure. Indeed, joint arrangements of all sorts operate now. There are joint boards and joint arrangements between local authorities, and local authorities can get together to contract out services under competitive tendering, if they wish to do so.

The hon. Gentleman asked about on-going costs and pensions. Touche Ross has assumed that there will be an on-going pension cost. As for information technology and councillor numbers, I understand that Touche Ross made a conscious decision not to include them in on-going costs, as they were considered to be either very speculative or relatively insignificant. That was a reasonable decision for the consultants to take in the circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about transitional costs and the estimates for retirement and redundancy costs. Touche Ross assumed a severance package based on the terms available during the Greater London council break up. It used assumptions about the number of staff likely to be involved based on information that it obtained. Of course, different assumptions would produce different estimates, but that does not mean that one estimate is wrong and that another is right. The final cost will depend on the level of the severance package on offer and the number of staff retiring or made redundant.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about transitional costs and the winding up of the existing authorities. Touche Ross has assumed that whatever structure is chosen, all the existing authorities will have to be wound up. The work involved will not, therefore, vary with the structure. I am aware of the suggestion that the cost of winding up the existing authorities could be as high as £275 million. Frankly, I believe that those figures are simply wrong.

Mr. Dalyell: If the Minister believes that the figures are wrong, what is the Scottish Office estimate? We are told we are wrong; what does the Scottish Office think?

Mr. Stewart: I was about to respond to that point before the hon. Gentleman intervened. It is worth noting that other reputable commentators have suggested that the costs assigned by Touche Ross are too high, not too low. The hon. Member for Linlithgow quite reasonably wanted to know the Scottish Office estimate of the costs of winding up the existing authorities. Given that the commentators

[Mr. Stewart]

have produced conflicting views, we are at present considering all the evidence that has been presented to us. We will set out the costs implications of the new structure when we publish the White Paper in due course.

Mr. Dalyell: That is a bit of a cop out. Who are those reputable commentators——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Mr. Stewart: I was not giving way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have already given way several times to the hon. Gentleman. He rather delayed me as I was about to answer his question.

To sum up, I welcome this debate. It is an opportunity to put on the record the excellent work of Touche Ross and to put the matter wholly and reasonably into context. Local government in Scotland is an issue of great importance and we all agree about that. I have no doubt that there will be considerable debate in the coming months about every aspect of our proposals—and rightly so.

No doubt the hon. Member for Monklands, West will want to comment on the fact that there has been much correspondence from people in Airdrie saying that they do not wish to be associated with Coatbridge under the new structure. No doubt hon. Members will wish to debate many other factors.

It is important that the debate should be about things that matter——

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): What about Eastwood?

Mr. Stewart: A combination of Airdrie and Eastwood is not one of the illustrative structures put forward in the consultation paper.

I do not believe that selective nitpicking of the preliminary conclusions of Touche Ross on costs and savings are productive.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Minister suggesting that my questions are nitpicking?

Mr. Stewart: I am not suggesting for a moment that the hon. Gentleman's questions are not valid. Of course they are valid and I have endeavoured to answer them as fully and as reasonably as I can. I hope that that takes the debate forward.

We now have evidence from a wide range of commentators in respect of the Touche Ross report. That allows us to proceed confidently and in full co-operation with our colleagues in the Treasury. The hon. Members for Linlithgow and for Monklands, West have put forward a thesis that there is some great split between the Treasury and the Scottish Office on these matters. I believe that it was the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) who said that the Treasury was outraged about the fact that it was being conned by the Scottish Office. I thought that that represented a world of fantasy wholly outside my experience of these matters.

We are proceeding with the co-operation of our colleagues in the Treasury to decide upon an appropriate single tier structure for Scotland. The detailed decisions, after the work——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

1. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures he is proposing to promote tourism in East Anglia; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Robert Key): The English tourist board, which receives grant in aid from my Department, will allocate at least £400,000 to the East Anglia tourist board during this financial year. The total allocation to each regional board has not been settled yet, as a proportion of regional funding will be distributed later in the year by means of a new scheme aimed at directing resources to areas where the industry is most in need of support.

Mr. Spring: Is my hon. Friend aware of the opening earlier this year of the Manor House museum in Bury St. Edmunds, which will house the borough's collection of paintings and porcelain and, in particular, its unique collection of clocks? That will further enhance the reputation of Bury St. Edmunds as a great jewel in the crown of East Anglia. Does my hon. Friend agree that the opening of the museum, and so many others like it, demonstrates the flowering of—and interest in—the arts that has come about in the past 10 years?

Mr. Key: I have indeed heard about the Manor House museum and its collections, and I know that my hon. Friend has supported it over the past year. It does, of course, represent, a jewel in the crown of East Anglia's tourist attractions; moreover, it confirms the flowering of the arts that has developed over the past decade or so. It is a little-known fact that, over the past 10 years, roughly one museum has opened every two weeks.

Royal Opera House

2. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what involvement his Department has had in discussions to increase private charitable funding to secure the future of the Royal Opera House.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Peter Brooke): It is for the Royal Opera House to take the lead in seeking sponsors for its proposed redevelopment scheme. I welcome the fact that it has already received pledges of significant private contributions to its appeal fund.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that redevelopment scheme is essential to the future of the Royal Opera House, or does he endorse the more sceptical view expressed by the Arts Council? What specific response have the Government made to the magnificent pledges of Mrs. Vivien Duffield and Lord Sainsbury?

Mr. Brooke: As the local Member of Parliament, I could not but be aware of the physical circumstances of the Royal Opera House. They have been described as Dickensian; I would say that, backstage, they owed even more to Gustave Doré. The ROH is clearly right to propose a redevelopment scheme.

As for the view of the Arts Council, it has, of course asked for reports, but it has also engaged in a continuing dialogue with the ROH. Mrs. Duffield and Lord Sainsbury, who have already been generous to the Tate and National galleries respectively, came to see the Prime Minister recently to describe developments in the scheme.

Mr. Fraser: I wish the appeal well, but does the Secretary of State agree that it is very difficult for people of moderate or poor means—as opposed to a person who is rich, corporate and probably a subscriber—to see world-famous singers at the Royal Opera House, because the numbers are limited to about 2,000? Following the example of President Mitterrand, has the right hon. Gentleman considered building a larger opera house, in which ordinary working-class people of moderate means, along with those who take advantage of corporate hospitality, could see world-famous singers?

Mr. Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for wishing the appeal well. The Royal Opera House has made it clear that it wants access to be improved, and the scheme will afford that—not only in terms of the number of seats available, but in terms of the number of performances that can be accommodated. While I do not wish the French President ill in any way, I think that the hon. Gentleman has been more generous to the new French opera house than other critics might be.

Windsor Castle (Fire)

3. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he is now able to give a formal estimate of the cost of the Windsor castle fire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: As I said in my statement to the House on 29 April, early estimates suggest that the reconstruction will cost £30 million to £40 million over five years. That is the estimate which I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 22 February.

Mr. Skinner: There have been estimates of up to £44 million in the newspapers recently. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that it has been alleged that the fire was caused as a result of criminal neglect, because of the removal of fire service cover? Why is it that they do not call upon the Queen to pay the lot and foot the bill, because they were responsible at the beginning? Why should there be one law for the Queen and another for the rest of the

British public? Why is it that they have got the gall to charge people for going into Buckingham palace to pay for the fire and to pay for her taxes? They are just a bunch of cheapskates.

Mr. Brooke: I take it that in his initial remarks the hon. Gentleman was referring to the Berkshire fire service report, which was made available within government on 19 April but which saw the light of day two days before the county council elections, which some may think was a remarkable coincidence. That report, as the chief fire officer has said, has been selectively quoted by others. As for the financing and maintenance of the royal palaces, the hon. Gentleman knows from our long-running dialogue that this was settled in 1831. Many hon. Members would welcome, as he did not, the Queen's decision to open Buckingham palace to the public and to make sure that the contributions are given to the restoration of the castle.

Mr. Jessel: As we have the finest Queen in the world, who is hugely admired and respected by the vast majority of people everywhere, will my right hon. Friend totally repudiate the unrepresentative view of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Can my right hon. Friend give a forecast of how much money the opening of Buckingham palace is likely to raise towards the Windsor castle repairs?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend, as the Member of Parliament for Hampton Court palace, does admirably in terms of his expressions of loyalty. I absolutely endorse what he says. The ticket sales for Buckingham palace will reinforce the ticket sales for Windsor castle. It is expected that that revenue will provide the clear and vast majority of the funds necessary for the restoration.

Freedom of the Press

4. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he next plans to meet representatives of the newspaper industry to discuss freedom of the press.

Mr. Brooke: I met the chairman of the Press Standards Board of Finance Limited on 9 March to discuss the newspaper industry's response to Sir David Calcutt's review of press self-regulation. I look forward to a future meeting with the board in due course.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the Secretary of State make it clear on the next occasion that he meets representatives of the press that the public will no longer tolerate chequebook journalism that destroys lives for the sake of the cheap, ephemeral headline and then moves on to the next headline, leaving shattered lives behind? Will he make it clear to them that they have failed lamentably in their paltry efforts to regulate themselves and that it is high time that they were subjected to external sanction and regulation?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman will have made his point to what is called Pressbof more vividly than any words that I could use. However, I join him in hoping that the press will continue to look at ways in which their methods of regulation can be improved.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend reiterate that a free press is a guarantee of our own freedom? Nazi Germany did not have a free press; South Africa did not have a free press. We are lucky to have a free press. Will my right hon. Friend reiterate that fact?

Mr. Brooke: I share my hon. Friend's support and acclaim of a free press. All hon. Members recognise that, although the press sometimes views the House with suspicion in case we should seek to encroach on its freedom, the responsibility for ensuring that we retain a free press, which I agree is one of the glories of our constitution, rests on the press itself.

Mr. Corbett: While the right hon. Gentleman is considering his response to the Calcutt and National Heritage Select Committee reports on press regulation, will he invite representatives of newspapers, magazines and broadcasting to talks about how the present laws, which inhibit press freedom, might be changed, and will he consider the threat of the concentration of ownership and cross-ownership of the media to the plurality of views and voices? In particular, will he now use powers contained in the Broadcasting Act 1990 to require Mr. Rupert Murdoch to choose between his ownership of BSkyB and five national newspapers?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is correct in his description of the need for the Government to determine their response to Sir David Calcutt's report and the Select Committee report. I pay tribute to the comprehensiveness of the latter. Its comprehensiveness sets the Government a considerable task in responding to it. As we wish to observe due courtesies to the House and to the speed at which we respond, it might be a mistake to enlarge the agenda further, but the question that the hon. Gentleman asked remains under review.

British Amateur Rugby League Association

5. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assistance has been given to the British Amateur Rugby League Association through the Sports Council in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The Sports Council provided £160,000 in grant aid payments to the British Amateur Rugby League Association in 1992-93. In addition, it provided considerable advice and expertise to BARLA on sports science, coaching and international issues.

Mr. Evans: Will the Minister pass on my appreciation of, and gratitude for, the excellent grant that the Sports Council gave the sport of amateur rugby league last year? Does he accept, however, that it is not only a question of the allocation of funds and will he undertake that until the increasingly professional sport of rugby union ends its policy of discrimination against rugby league it will not receive a donation from the national lottery?

Mr. Key: We had an excellent debate on this, albeit in the middle of the night, on 28 April which was initiated by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who is in his place today. It is not in my gift to do what the hon. Gentleman asks. It is crucial that we maintain the arm's-length principle of funding and Ministers will not decide who benefits from the lottery. However, as I said on 28 April, it is important to have a wide debate on the issues and, as I suggested at the end of my speech, perhaps a few heads need knocking together.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the opportunities to support rugby league and amateur rugby union have increased dramatically in recent years, and will he join me in praising all those who encourage and educate children in those sports, especially those who are involved in amateur rugby league and rugby union in Blackpool, which is a home for both sports?

Mr. Key: Yes, of course, my hon. Friend is absolutely right and I welcome his comments. As a former teacher, it would be surprising if I did not recognise the importance of sport for young people.

Monuments (Greater London)

6. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received in the last six months as regards the future maintenance and stewardship of monuments within Greater London.

Mr. Brooke: I have received various representations from organisations and individuals about the future maintenance and stewardship of monuments in Greater London.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is the Secretary of State aware of the widespread concern not only among professionals in conservation work but ordinary, proud Londoners, who see their capital city falling into decay? Will he address himself to the fact that there are 831 grade I and grade II listed buildings on English Heritage's at-risk register in Greater London? Does he accept that the Albert memorial, shored up as it is, is just a symbol of greater decay throughout the capital? What will he do about it? Does he understand that the fact that he might universally be considered a nice man is twinned with the fact that he is considered to be a totally useless Minister?

Mr. Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the cordiality of his question. I recently announced the Government's determination of the English Heritage strategy on the care of listed buildings in London. I am conscious that it decided recently to place the Albert memorial on the list of buildings at risk. It is an issue on which there is some disagreement between my Department and English Heritage, but we recognise the point that it wished to make and, as has been made clear, we will return to the restoration of the Albert memorial as soon as appropriate funds allow.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the comment that he just heard is not typical of the House? Most hon. Members see him as a living memorial to the triumphs of the arts and Conservative policy, and long may that continue to be the case. May I endorse what the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said about the Albert memorial—he will know that I have taken up that issue—which is a memorial not only to Prince Albert but to the triumph of the arts and sciences during that age of British history and is precious to Londoners and people throughout the country.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks although, as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) had adopted an antithetical style by saying something friendly followed by something disagreeable, I had the faintest misgiving that perhaps my hon. Friend was going to reverse the process. I have made it clear that, by definition, the Government recognise the importance of the Albert memorial. As and when funds allow—we shall approach the subject during the future public expenditure round—we will resume its restoration.

Dr. Reid: Is not it the case that Buckingham palace is the most popular, well-known and often-visited of all the monuments, memorials and historic buildings in inner London? In view of that fact, will the Minister tell us what projection the Government have made of the income that the Queen will receive during the next five years? As he has decided to issue tickets in advance, through travel operators and others, what considerations are the Government giving to the prospect of those awful west end parasites, the ticket touts, meandering their way in front of Buckingham palace? Have they considered that and would it not be a demeaning spectacle if the residence of the head of state were to be marred by those very parasites?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his praise of Buckingham palace as a symbol of our nation, although architectural critics have not always been so kind. The decisions about access to Buckingham palace were taken by the royal household, which will be in charge of access arrangements. As I understand it, the group tickets have already sold out and I imagine that the old-fashioned British principle of queuing will apply to people applying for tickets individually.

Television Licence Fee (Abolition)

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to abolition of the television licence fee.

Mr. Key: The licence fee will continue at least until the expiry of the present royal charter in 1996. The longer-term future of the licence fee will be considered as part of the charter review.

Mrs. Gorman: Has my hon. Friend read in the newspapers during the past few days about the massive windfall that some directors of independent television companies have picked up simply because they managed to gain one of the franchises? Does not that show that there is masses of money in the private sector that could fund television programmes on BBC, just as well as it funds programmes on ITV? Is not it quite wrong that if grandad wishes to watch "Coronation Street" on ITV as opposed to "EastEnders" on BBC, or grandma prefers "This is your Life" on ITV to "One Foot in the Grave", they must pay £85 a year for a lot of programmes that they do not want to watch, when private sector money is available to fund the BBC?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend has put her finger on an important point. Indeed, it was a point raised by her constituent Mr. Leonard Jones of 77 Belmont avenue, Wickford in his letter to her of 20 October which she forwarded to me. I am grateful to her for raising that point. It is part of the charter review process and we will consider that representation.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Given the limitations of the licence fee, especially as it affects pensioners, will the Minister accept that many Labour Members would be sceptical

about any alternative form of funding the BBC that left it open either to crude market forces or to increased Government intrusion in programme making?

Mr. Key: I accept that very important point. There are two sides to the argument. I also take the point about concessionary licences over which the House and successive Governments have wrangled for many years. It would be very expensive to change the position. Conservative Members and, I suspect, all other Members do not regard the licence as an instrument of social policy.

Mr. Dickens: Many years ago, I asked for the television licence to be completely abolished and I supported a Labour Bill on that. Will my hon. Friend try to get away from the licence fee? We employ many people to go round with detector vans, and we have to replace and maintain those vans. It costs a lot of money that could go towards television programmes. There must be a better way. It would help pensioners tremendously not to have to pay those large bills.

Mr. Key: Of course I recognise my hon. Friend's point about the cost to pensioners. It is also worth making the point that the BBC licence fee costs about 23p a day. My hon. Friend's representation will be taken into account and we shall have to work out a way forward. It is worth noting that we have received more than 6,000 representations in response to the paper that we published before Christmas. I do not think that there has ever been such a widespread review of broadcasting policy.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am sure that the Minister agrees that among the vast amount of evidence that he has received, no coherent argument is emerging for changing the current system of financing the BBC through the licence fee. The debate on the future of the BBC cannot be seen in isolation from the wider broadcasting industry and from the chaos caused by the Broadcasting Act 1990. Will the Minister admit today that ITV is in danger of being swamped by imported American programmes and that the BBC could become the only significant source of original, high-quality United Kingdom production? When will he face up to his responsibilities and take up his responsibility to amend the invidious and infamous Broadcasting Act 1990?

Mr. Key: I accept my responsibilities; I have broad shoulders and I intend to use them. However, I do not accept for one moment that the ITV companies are in danger of being swamped by anything. They are vibrant and strong, and they are making programmes that are held in worldwide esteem. Of course there are coherent arguments on all sides of the debate about the future funding of the BBC. The hon. Lady has done her bit to destroy confidence in the ITV companies by some of her recent comments.

Millennium Fund

8. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for the millennium fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Subject to the views of another place, the millennium fund will finance a number of projects, large and small, throughout the United Kingdom to celebrate fittingly the beginning of the third millennium. I hope that the fund will also endow a system of bursaries.

Mr. Greenway: May I have my right hon. Friend's assurance that the millennium fund will not be used only to fund monuments in London and in the rest of the country, although they may have a place? Could not an imaginative scheme be developed to advance the cause of individuals and the welfare of people as we move into the third millennium and seek to establish a completely new spirit for the whole nation and for the world?

Mr. Brooke: In 1851 and in 1951, which are the most recent parallels and analogies, when my party was not in power, the monuments were concentrated heavily in London. I do not know who will be in power when the millennium is celebrated, although I have great confidence in my own party. One thing of which I hope I can be certain is that the monuments will be spread throughout the United Kingdom.

In the context of my hon. Friend's question, as I said, I hope that there will also be bursaries. I hope that they will be enjoyed not only by those starting out on their careers but by those starting out in retirement and that that will be in the spirit of what my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Dalyell: Could millennium funds be diverted to the Albert memorial? Is it not a fact that, because of deterioration related to copper sulphate and iron oxide, any repairs will be more difficult and infinitely more expensive in 1994 than they would be if they were done straight away, in 1993? Is not this a classic case of a stitch in time saving nine?

Mr. Brooke: All uses of lottery funds will be decided by those named as the distributors under the National Lottery etc. Bill. It will be for the distributors to decide on the quality of applications on the basis of the advice that they receive. I recognise that the Albert memorial might be such a candidate——

Mr. Dalyell: This summer.

Mr. Brooke: The Bill does not become an Act until later this year. The use of millennium funds may fall foul of the principle of additionality, which is important to Opposition and Conservative Members alike.

Mr. Robert Banks: I appreciate that there are difficulties in deciding what should mark the millennium, but will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that our music industry, and the popular music industry in particular, has some of the greatest talent in the world? Does he agree that the establishment of a great music palace, within whose walls the popular music of previous decades and of the present could be played, would be a fitting and exciting way in which to mark the millennium?

Mr. Brooke: I have no doubt that a series of imaginative proposals will be put to the Millennium Commission when it is established. My hon. Friend's idea seems a good candidate, but applications will be treated on their merits by the commission.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Secretary of State know why questions such as that raised by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) are being posed now? Could it be because of the secrecy that has been a hallmark of his Department's approach to certain aspects of the National Lottery etc. Bill? Is he aware that the GAH report, which his Department commissioned but refused to publish, has now been published—conveniently, after

the Bill has received its Third Reading and at the exorbitant cost of £695 a copy? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be a scandal if GAH made a financial killing on the back of public money, especially given that hon. Members were denied access to the contents of that report during the passage of the Bill?

Mr. Brooke: I take mild exception to the hon. Gentleman's observation about the Government's secrecy in the context of the millennium fund. We have sought to be open in every answer that we have given. The report published by GAH earlier today was not commissioned by the Government and has not yet been seen by my Department.

Mr. Cormack: May I ask my right hon. Friend to be a little less modest about who will be in power at the time of the millennium and a little less cautious in his replies about the Albert memorial? Can he not put in a good word, as it is a total scandal that that great memorial is rotting away under scaffolding?

Mr. Brooke: I am certain that, with the continuing and robust support of my hon. Friend, my party will be in power at the time of the millennium. I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that his support is robustly given during the seven years from now. As regards the Albert memorial, I can only repeat what I said and draw my hon. Friend's attention to the principle of additionality, which is of some importance in the overall lottery equation.

Arts Council for Wales

9. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he next intends to meet the Arts Council for Wales to discuss funding.

Mr. Brooke: I have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Hain: When the Secretary of State meets the Arts Council for Wales, will he use his good offices to press for additional funding for the Pontardawe international music festival? That unique and excellent local event attracts 20,000 spectators and participants to its annual August festival. Although it has received some additional grant aid in the past few years, it is run by an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers who need permanent funding to assist them of the kind that goes towards specialist but narrowly based forms of music. Will the Secretary of State press for that funding on a permanent basis? I invite him to attend the festival over the weekend of 20 to 22 August, if he is in that part of the world.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me advance warning that he intended to raise the subject of the Pontardawe music festival. I gather that, last year, West Wales Arts began to give a development grant to the festival of £5,000 for each of three financial years. That grant attracted funds from other sources for the 1992 festival. I hope that the organisers achieve the same this year. As to the future, the hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will take responsibility for the Arts Council for Wales on 1 April next year. For future years, perhaps the hon. Gentleman's request should be more locally delivered.

Midlands Mainline Rail Services

10. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the impact on the tourist industry in the east midlands of the level of service on the midlands main line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: English tourist board research indicates that 8 per cent. of trips to the east midlands in 1991 were made by train. British Rail has already invested significant sums to upgrade the line.

Mr. Barnes: Is there not a danger that the east midlands will become a backwater in terms of tourism, commercial provision and industrial activity unless it has an effective rail link in the midlands main line, for which electrification is required? If the line is to link with the heart of Europe through St. Pancras, electrification begins to be required. Could the Secretary of State for Transport be informed that it is no to privatisation and yes to electrification?

Mr. Key: As far as I am concerned, it is yes to tourism in Derbyshire. I shall visit Derbyshire on Thursday to launch the Peak tourism partnership. I shall, of course, explain to the people of Derbyshire the benefits to tourism of privatisation and of electrification, which may or may not happen. Railtrack will be financed primarily through charges to the users, but, as it was originally a nationalised industry, it will have access to Government loans. Privatisation will therefore increase the range of public support mechanisms for infrastructure spending.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that tourists who wish to visit the east midlands, and Derbyshire in particular, have benefited considerably in recent years by continued and sustained investment in the rail infrastructure on that line? Does he agree that the journey time for tourists to reach the east midlands is now 30 to 45 mintues quicker than it was five or six years ago?

Mr. Key: Of course, my hon. Friend is right. I travel on that line. I know that it is an excellent line. I wish that some of the other lines in Britain were as good.

Freedom of the Press

11. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he intends to take to protect a free press.

Mr. Key: In deciding our response to the recommendations of Sir David Calcutt and the National Heritage Select Committee on press self-regulation, we shall be guided by our commitment to freedom of the press, which is a cornerstone of our democracy.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that it is something of a paradox that we have more television stations, more newspapers and thicker newspapers, yet they appear to be in the ownership of fewer and fewer hands? Should not the Minister be wary about the freedom of the press in Britain after the experience of self-censorship of those people who worked for the Mirror Newspaper Group during Maxwell's days? Should he not cite as an example the Scott trust, which was supposedly a good thing but which has used the *Manchester Evening News* and *The Guardian* to increase its share of newspaper ownership in Greater Manchester?

Mr. Key: It is perfectly valid to talk about concentration of media ownership, but that is a slightly different issue from the freedom of the press to comment on events, people and activities. As I have just said, that is the cornerstone of our democracy.

Television Franchises

12. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the television franchise system.

Mr. Brooke: It is too early to consider changes to the arrangements which came into effect at the beginning of the year, but I shall keep the working of the Broadcasting Act 1990 under review.

Ms. Quin: Does the Minister agree that the crazy auction system by which the franchises were allocated has already led to severe problems, particularly in the case of Tyne Tees Television? Is he aware of the great concern in the north-east of England about job losses at Tyne Tees, about the failure to deliver the regional programmes that were promised and the effect on the region's media industry, which many of us want to see expand? What specific steps will he take to resolve the matter?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Lady takes a more pessimistic view of the working of the Act and of the health of the federal system than other, more objective, critics might. I made it clear on 6 May, in answer to a question that she tabled, that the Independent Television Commission was looking at the Yorkshire-Tyne Tees merger and its consequences, and I look forward to its report.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister care about broken franchise promises and companies using every ruse in the book to deny the truth to the ITC? Is it not a fact that the Broadcasting Act 1990 has led to a big increase in acquired programmes, with the obligation to produce 86 per cent. of programmes falling to only 65 per cent., with worse to come? Surely even the Minister must realise that the Act will result in less innovation and a narrower range of programmes for viewers. That must call for some concern from him.

Mr. Brooke: I yield to none in wishing to sustain the production base of television and broadcasting in this country. It underlay the Green Paper that we issued on the BBC last November, and I regard it as important in national and international terms. The hon. Lady constantly tempts me to interfere with the ITC, which has responsibility under the Act, and, in the process, interfere with the arm's-length principle which governs most of the activities in which my Department is engaged and which we regard as an admirable part of the British system. The hon. Lady would do more justice to her overall position if she did not constantly ask me to interfere in matters of particulars.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disabled People

29. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that specific provision is made in the various charters for the needs of disabled people.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): Charters should take account of the needs of all customers and set standards of service which apply to all of them, including people with disabilities.

Mr. Wareing: Is the Minister aware that since, tragically, the Conservatives came to power in 1979, there have been five private Members' Bills, including two of mine, designed to outlaw discrimination against disabled people? When will the Government break the habit of a lifetime and listen to people, including every disabled persons' organisation? Is he aware that they all believe that those measures should have been allowed through by the Government? Will he make sure that there is early legislation to ensure that, in future, disabled people in Britain are regarded as first-class rather than second-class citizens?

Mr. Waldegrave: That comes ill from the Labour party. There has been a 300 per cent. real-terms increase in spending on the disabled since the Labour party was last in power. That is a record to be proud of.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the publication of charters for individual services was the best way to proceed, rather than publication for groups of services? Does he further agree that the publication of individual services must improve a particular service, rather than that of a whole sector?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Much the best way to get better standards from organisations is to set targets for them. That is why I am pleased to say that 27 of the 31 existing charters have specific targets aimed at helping disabled people, and I hope that the other four will be improved so that they do, too.

Ms Hoey: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that an important need for people in receipt of disability benefit and those in receipt of other benefits, such as pensioners, is flexibility and choice as to how the benefit is paid? Does he realise that the Department of Social Security is introducing new forms that do not give the option of payment through post offices? Given the inconvenience and hardship that that will cause to all those claiming benefits, particularly the disabled, will he stand up for the citizen's right to choose and stop the DSS acting in such a devious manner?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no intention to infringe in any way the right of people to choose how they want their pensions or other benefits paid. I believe that the DSS has been carrying out experiments to find out whether various alternative methods of payment are acceptable, but no decisions have been taken on any changes.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the system of charters brings great benefits to people with disabilities, in housing, transport, education, and so on? Will my right hon. Friend ensure, as and when new charters are developed and introduced, that he always bears in mind the need to consult people with disabilities and their organisations, in order to produce all consultative documents in forms that people with visual handicaps can understand?

Mr. Waldegrave: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend's point. We have produced a range of tapes and

material in Braille for that very purpose. I had a useful meeting with members of the all-party disablement group recently, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) and for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), at which we discussed those issues.

Psoriasis and Acne

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what support he gives to research on psoriasis and acne, and other related dermatological topics; and what representations he has had in relation to such research from the National Eczema Society.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): The main agency through which the Government support research into skin disease is the Medical Research Council. In the financial year 1991-92, the MRC's expenditure on research directly relevant to psoriasis and other dermatological disorders was more than £2·3 million.

Mr. Dalyell: As one who was a spotty teenager, greatly embarrassed by acne during my national service, may I ask the Government sympathetically to monitor the representations that have been put forward, on supposedly relatively minor disorders, by the National Eczema Society? What is the Government's response on the effort on research of the limited list procedures put forward to them by Rona MacKie, professor of dermatology at the university of Glasgow, and John Hunter, head of the big dermatology department in Edinburgh?

Mr. Jackson: To look at the hon. Gentleman's elegant countenance, one would never have thought that he was a spotty youth. The Government are aware of those concerns. It is necessary to balance the costs and the benefits to patients, to the industry and the taxpayer. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs will look this summer at all the dermatological drugs available on the NHS and will take into account the perspective to which he referred.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that over the past 10 years there has been a significant increase in asthma and eczema cases and other atopic illnesses? Does he agree that that may be linked to environmental factors relating to car pollution? Will he therefore liaise with his colleagues in the Department of the Environment to make sure that any research carried out takes cognisance of that fact?

Mr. Jackson: I will draw those comments to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Medical Research Council is at arm's length from the Government —it makes decisions about priorities—but it is important that it should reflect on that important aspect, and I will ensure that it is aware of what has been said.

Charters

32. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps his Department is taking to ensure that individual charters are systematically reviewed and strengthened.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Charters are a baseline for continued improvement. As standards are met, they are reviewed and raised and new standards are developed as appropriate. Delivery is for the service providers in the first place, but my Department keeps a sharp eye on it through, for example, the Prime Minister's seminars and our published reports.

Mr. Legg: I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that the parents charter is regularly revised, and in particular to take account of the additional information that will be available to parents once full testing of the national curriculum is introduced.

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of testing and the connection between that and information. The recent polls show that parents want more information about the performance of schools and their children. They have not yet seen perhaps as clearly as they should the connection between testing and that information. We have to explain that connection, but it is vital that we continue with the testing programme to ensure that the information that parents want is available to them.

Mr. Kaufman: Will the hon. Gentleman say what remedy the charters provide against the squandering of taxpayers' money by the Benefits Agency? For example, £2·1 million has been spent on health screening programmes in private clinics for staff aged 35 and over, 86,000 individual items of corporate clothing costing £2·1 million have been provided and £6·8 million has been spent on overtime because of the total incompetence with which the disability living allowance system has been administered. That makes a total of £10 million already, which could have been spent on benefits instead of nonsense. Will the hon. Gentleman now sack Mr. Michael Bichard and restore parliamentary accountability for the Department of Social Security?

Mr. Jackson: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman regards expenditure on health screening as squandering money. I am also surprised that he has attacked good employment practice in the civil service. He asked about the relationship between those factors and the charters, which focus on outputs from public services. There have been problems with the DSS agency's outputs —they have been clearly recognised and are being tackled. The charters do not involve the sort of expenditure to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, as that would not be sensible when trying to manage an organisation that provides good outputs for patients, clients and customers.

Market Testing

33. **Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will report regularly on the progress of the market-testing programme.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am happy to be able to tell the House that when the current market-testing programme for the year to September 1993 is completed, I shall publish the outcome in line with our citizens charter principle of providing more information on Government activities.

I have also set in hand the publishing of a contracts bulletin which, from this summer, will announce all Departments' future programmes and then all individual market-testing contracts when they are under competition.

Mrs. Browning: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when the bulletin is published, it will be made fully available to the small business community, which will find it extremely useful when tendering for contracts that were previously not available to it? Will he ensure that it is widely available and written in plain English?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The work that we have done makes it clear that the bulletin will be particularly helpful to smaller companies that may be interested in smaller contracts.

Ms Mowlam: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, since his appointment last year, his disagreements with Cabinet colleagues and his lack of political will have turned the market-testing programme into a fiasco, produced the chaos that we now see in the civil service and stalled his commitment to open government? We are still awaiting the White Paper on science. What steps will he take to ensure that when the inevitable Cabinet reshuffle takes place, after the fiasco last week, it will not result in the right hon. Gentleman being replaced by one of his more dynamic colleagues?

Mr. Waldegrave: One thing that was made perfectly clear by all the commentators over the weekend was that we had reached another stage in the terminal decline of the Labour party. Having listened to the hon. Lady's contribution, one can see why. The hon. Lady hopes that the market-testing programme will go away, but she will find that it will not—we will proceed with it for the benefit of taxpayers and those who use public services.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the civil servants who have been involved in market testing have demonstrated that once their sense of enterprise is released, they are able to do their jobs much better? Certainly, the agencies demonstrate good enterprise within the civil service and the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. Indeed, many in the public service are far more forward looking than the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam). As Jo Rogaly said in the *Financial Times* last week, the Labour party stands for nothing except "the maintenance of bureaucracies".

Citizens Charters

34. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further plans he has to review and amend citizens charters.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have just given to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg).

Mr. Gerrard: Is the Minister aware that the citizens charter's list of performance indicators for local government includes hardly any that relate specifically to services to ethnic minority communities and contains no mention of major services such as education? Does he accept that record keeping and monitoring are an essential part of ensuring that equal opportunities policies operate effectively? Will he ensure that charters and performance indicators do not continue simply to ignore them?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. It is important to monitor the participation of ethnic minorities in a range of activities. I will certainly draw the attention of the Audit Commission, which is responsible for local government performance indicators, to what the hon. Gentleman said about ethnic minorities. We shall certainly bear in mind the interests of ethnic minorities in drawing up all the charters so that, where appropriate, they can be taken into account.

Sir Paul Beresford: Will my hon. Friend, in reviewing and amending the citizens charter, recognise that in local government the achievement of a charter mark was accepted with pleasure by competent local authorities at the top of the scale? However, there is considerable wastage at the bottom end of the scale and it would benefit the public, in terms of the quality of services and potential savings, if heavier pressure were placed on local authorities at the bottom end of the charter list.

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend, with his great experience of local government, is absolutely right. I should like to draw the attention of the Opposition Front Bench to a statement made recently in the *Municipal Journal* by the leader of the Labour party on Berkshire county council, Dr. Lawrence Silverman, who seems to be well in advance of his party in the House. He said:

"if the private sector can provide computing, payroll and other financial services cheaper than the in-house bureaucracy, then we owe it to the people . . . to make these savings and to put the money saved into direct services".

My hon. Friend and Dr. Silverman are absolutely right; it is Opposition Members who have not quite got the point.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In reviewing and amending charters, the Minister placed considerable emphasis on responsiveness to public demand. On the education charter and particularly testing, given the thumbs down from teachers, the public at the polls and even education advisers to the Secretary of State for Education, will the Minister at least draw the Secretary of State's attention to the fact that the citizens charter is meant to pay attention to other people's views and, one hopes, will do so before the system descends into chaos?

Mr. Jackson: Of course we have to pay attention to people's views and explain our policies clearly and effectively. But, as I said earlier, we have to explain that there is a vital connection between testing and the information that parents are seeking about the performance of schools.

Lady Olga Maitland: In reviewing charters, is my hon. Friend aware that the passengers charter is working very well? Last weekend, I was on a train from Truro to London which was an hour and a half late. Every courtesy was extended to me, plus an offer of compensation. Does that not show that the Government put people first and that they care?

Mr. Jackson: There is no doubt that an improvement in performance has been effected by the way in which the charters are picking up the performance of public services through monitoring, and a significant contribution is being made.

Taurid Object (Debris)

35. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment the Government have made about the Earth's vulnerability from debris

shed from the Taurid object; and in what scientific and international initiatives the Government are involved in order to gather intelligence about the threat presented by asteroid strikes generally.

Mr. Waldegrave: The chief scientific adviser last year consulted extensively on the threat posed by asteroids. The conclusion reached was that the United Kingdom should not divert major Government resources to research in this area, although work on asteroid collisions is going on at Sheffield university.

The United States have been looking at the matter carefully, and I understand that its conclusions have led it to fund a limited detection programme. Clearly, it would be pointless to duplicate that research. We shall, however, continue to monitor the research undertaken and keep our approach under review.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful for the Minister's reply. Does he understand that large numbers of distinguished scientists and experts throughout the world are alarmed by their inability to alert Governments to the gravity of the situation? Will he give the matter further consideration? In particular, I commend to him an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 25 April by its science correspondent which explained with great clarity the seriousness of the matter, which really should not be treated with levity by the House.

Mr. Waldegrave: Let no one say that Members representing Essex take only a parochial view of matters. The hon. Gentleman is right. I have read the article to which he refers, and there is a real issue here. At this stage, it is a research issue. We are well in touch with the international network studying it.

Mr. Roger Evans: Will my right hon. Friend consider the theory that the dinosaurs' lives came to an end as a result of an asteroid? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I want to listen to the hon. Gentleman, but there is a great deal of noise going on. Let me hear whether his question is in order.

Mr. Evans: Would my right hon. Friend agree that the concern shown by the Labour party is deeply ironic in this context and that research, at this stage, is as far as it need go?

Mr. Waldegrave: Probably the straightforward answer to that is, yes.

Research Foresight Concepts

36. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent discussions he has had with industry about research foresight concepts; and whether these will be covered in his science and technology White Paper.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Office of Science and Technology published a report by the science policy research unit at Sussex university on research foresight in March this year. I and my officials have had many discussions on such foresight with major British companies and the Confederation of British Industry in preparing for the White Paper.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful for that reply. We greatly look forward to the publication of the White Paper as a result. Is my right hon. Friend aware that a number of our competitors, including the United States and Japan, already participate in such foresight exercises?

Mr. Waldegrave: Indeed they do, and so do the Germans, the Dutch and people from other competitor countries. There may well be lessons to be learnt, which is why I have been in touch with the Sussex university unit, one of the centres of expertise on this subject.

Dr. Bray: Is the Chancellor of the Duchy aware that other Governments in Europe and the European Commission take a considerably greater interest in this matter than do the British Government and that, in the conferences planned on the European Community fast programme, he and his colleagues are participating but little?

Mr. Waldegrave: We shall be coming to the discussion on the fourth framework programme, where a great deal of work is going on in this country, to make sure that our negotiating position is properly organised. The hon. Gentleman will find that we do not hold back when it comes to putting forward Britain's views on this matter.

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Madam Speaker——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have a Standing Order No. 20 application to hear from the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe).

Lyons Bakeries (Wakefield)

3.31 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"job losses in the Wakefield metropolitan district".

At 5 pm last Friday evening, I was informed by Lyons Bakeries (UK) Ltd of its intention to close down its Wakefield bakery and transfer the production of Lyons cakes elsewhere. Currently, about 334 full-time and 147 part-time staff are employed at the bakery, the plant being one of the largest employers in my constituency.

The announcement of the closure comes only a fortnight after the announcement of the closure of the Lofthouse Foods factory in Wakefield. Although that factory is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), several hundred of the 1,300 people losing their jobs there live in my constituency. Indeed, only the other day a neighbour came around asking for a reference for another job, having lost his job at that plant after nearly 40 years of working there.

The loss of nearly 2,000 jobs in such a short space of time would have a devastating impact on any area, but the impact on Wakefield is even more acute, because of the huge loss of employment that the district has faced owing to the rundown of coalmining and associated industries.

Since 1979, more than 20,000 such jobs have disappeared from Wakefield, and about 2,000 mining engineering jobs have gone in my constituency alone since 1987.

The consequence of this job haemorrhage in coal has been that women have increasingly become the main breadwinners in many homes. Female employment provided by companies such as Lyons Bakeries, even part-time, has often been the sole source of income of a growing number of families. On the latest available official estimate, 15,533 people were unemployed in the Wakefield district. That is a 7·5 per cent. increase over the previous year.

There are further huge projected job losses on the horizon, with 700 likely to lose their jobs when Sharlston colliery, in the adjacent Normanton constituency, closes shortly. The Wakefield area simply cannot take any further job losses, and there is a need to give urgent consideration to steps that must be taken to stop further redundancies and create new employment opportunities. Assisted area status is long overdue.

I appreciate the importance of today's business, Madam Speaker, but I am sure that you will understand——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not timed himself, and his time is now up. I have given very careful attention to what he has said, and I have to give my decision, as he knows, without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

3.36 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): You will recollect, Madam Speaker, that in the past few months, and particularly a week ago, you had various points of order arising out of what was, parliamentary-wise, in order in relation to Lord Justice Scott and his report. I apologise for not giving you warning of this point of order, but I went to the Scott inquiry at 1 Buckingham gate this morning to see Mrs. Presiley Baxendale QC and others cross-questioning a witness from the Ministry of Defence, Mr. Christopher Sandars. It was quite clear from what was to a layman a very impressive examination that this is an inquiry that will go on for many months. I do not doubt that Lord Justice Scott will take extreme care about this inquiry, as indeed the House of Commons expects of him.

The point of order for you is this. In the light of what you said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and me, and other Members, on previous occasions, could you reflect on whether the House of Commons should be anaesthetised from asking questions about this whole area that is within the remit of Lord Justice Scott so long as this inquiry goes on, because that would mean that we could not ask meaningful questions for perhaps a year?

Madam Speaker: I have explained to the hon. Gentleman earlier, but he probably has not understood me, that there is no sub judice rule whatsoever in terms of the inquiry. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) is nodding very wisely, and he understands. I have said this many times in the House. If the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will take a look at *Hansard*, he will see that I have spelt this out extremely clearly on more than one occasion.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Last Thursday, Madam Speaker, you told my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche):

"There can be no Government responsibility for finance given to a political party."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. 282.]

May I seek your guidance arising from what you said at the time, although obviously the situation has changed somewhat? Yesterday in the *Sunday Express*, a former treasurer of the Conservative party, Lord McAlpine, said that Mr. Nadir had come to him and said that he had been very good to the Conservative party; that they were the Government and could help him. He added:

"I have given millions for the Conservative party"—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Member be heard.

Mr. Winnick: My point of order, Madam Speaker, is simply this. Since substantial sums of money were given to the party in office, obviously to buy influence, would it be possible—*[Interruption.]* We cannot be heckled and shouted down, I hope, Madam Speaker. Would it therefore be possible for hon. Members to make a passing reference to the subject of the finances of the Conservative party? I have already brought to your notice what you said last Thursday. I hope that that can now be amended and that, if we make a passing reference to the substantial sums of money that Mr. Nadir gave to the Conservative——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have got the hon. Gentleman's point of order. The Conservative party is not the Government.—*[Interruption.]* Order. If hon. Members will reflect on this, they will perfectly understand. The Government have no responsibility for the activities of the Conservative party. The hon. Member knows this full well, as a member of the Procedure Committee. He often reminds the House that he is a member of that Committee. I must remind him now what the procedures are. There is no responsibility, in terms of the Government, for a political party.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Earlier, we had questions about the freedom of the press. Would it be in order when discussing that subject to refer to the donations by Mr. Maxwell to the Labour party?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On several occasions recently, you have deprecated the fact that Ministers have made statements on television before making them to the House. We know that, this morning, there was an important meeting of senior Ministers at Downing street, arising out of the debacle last Thursday in the local government elections. A projection based on the returns in those elections suggests that, in a general election, nine of the 10 parliamentary seats in Derbyshire would return Labour Members. Would it not be right and proper today, as we are discussing the Finance Bill, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister and the rest of the ragbag Tory Government to explain their conduct and tell the British people that they will resign, so that we can have a general election?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a point of order for the Chair. As is often the case, he is taking advantage of the time of the House.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member made the Affirmation required by law:

David Digby Rendel.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

UNFAIR DISMISSAL

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

INSURANCE COMPANIES

That the draft Insurance Companies (Cancellation) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

COUNTY COURTS

That the draft High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

LEGAL AID

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Scope) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Ghana) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (India) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Uganda) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Ukraine) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Finance (No. 2) Bill

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Ordered,

That the order in which proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the Finance (No. 2) Bill are to be taken shall be Clause 42, Clause 183, Clause 48, Clause 52, Clause 67, Clause 115.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I understand that in the amendments that we are about to consider is one that, in one of the few instances in the history of Parliament, imposes taxation that no future British Government will be able to remove, in terms of the sixth directive, as amended. So that the House and the public may be fully informed, may I ask whether, in all future cases where taxes are imposed that cannot be removed by a future Government, the clauses concerned will be marked in a special way?

Parliament has always had a tradition that taxes can be raised or reduced by the House of Commons. However, in cases where taxes, once imposed, cannot be removed—and there may be quite a few in the future—is there no way in which the Order Paper, or the Vote, can be specially marked so that hon. Members are well aware that what they are doing cannot be reversed?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): That is a matter for the Select Committee on Procedure, rather than for the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I note the provisional selection of amendments and the groupings. Would it be in order for us to take all the groups together in a single debate, for the convenience of the House?

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris. May I say, as the mover of one of the separate groups of amendments, that it might well be for the convenience of the Committee if we took all the groups together, and then moved as soon as possible to a vote in which my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) could register his constituents' rejection of the proposal to put VAT on fuel?

The Chairman: Hon. Members will be aware that this is a provisional selection of amendments. Although it is fair to say that the Chair has taken some care and time over it, if it is the will of the House for all the groups to be taken together, the Chair is happy with that.

Clause 42

FUEL AND POWER FOR DOMESTIC OR CHARITY USE

3.45 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to move amendment No. 1 in page 23, line 40, after 'use', insert 'subject to the exceptions set out in subsection 3A below'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient also to discuss all the other amendments to clause 42: No. 4, in page 23, line 40, after 'shall', insert

'except for supplies for domestic use'.

No. 5, in page 23, line 40, after 'shall', insert

'except for supplies for charity use'.

No. 39, in page 23, line 41, leave out from 'importation' to the end of line 42 and insert

'for domestic use made or taking place on or after 1st April 1994 and on that day notes 1(a), 2, 3 and 5 to the said group 7 shall be deleted.'.

No. 36, in page 23, line 42, at end insert—

'Except where the supply is for use by a charity in either or both of the following ways, namely—

(a) otherwise than in the course of furtherance of a business

(b) as a village hall or similarly in providing social or recreational facilities for a local community.'.

No. 18, in page 24, line 17, at end insert—

'(3A) The supplies to be excepted are—

(a) standing charges in connection with the supply of fuel and power;

(b) rental charges for gas and electricity meters; and

(c) charges for installation of and connection to fuel and power supplies.'.

No. 6, in page 23, line 42, leave out '1994' and insert '1998'.

No. 9, in page 24, line 4, leave out '1994' and insert '1998'.

No. 14, in page 24, line 4, leave out '1995' and insert '1999'.

No. 15, in page 24, line 8, leave out '1994' and insert '1998'.

No. 16, in page 24, line 8, leave out '1995' and insert '1999'.

No. 7, in page 24, line 1, after '(2)', insert

'For the purposes of this section'.

No. 8, in page 24, leave out lines 3 to 8.

No.11, in page 24, line 9, leave out '8' and insert '5'.

No. 17, in page 24, line 9, leave out '8' and insert '0.01'.

Ms Harman: Today, the Prime Minister is having panic meetings to discuss the damage that the country—— *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not seem to have noticed what has happened. Perhaps they are not aware that today the Prime Minister is having panic meetings to discuss the damage that the country has just done to the Tory party. Instead, he should be holding a meeting to discuss the damage that the Tory party has done to the country. He is listening to the chairman of the Conservative party——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Would it be appropriate and proper —if so, I should be grateful—for you to tell us on which amendments the Committee is likely to vote later this evening?

The Chairman: The Chair is, to a degree, in the hands of the Committee. The Chair must listen to the debate before making a decision. I certainly cannot say now when the votes will be.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister is listening to the chairman of the Conservative party, and to the Government Chief Whip; but he should be listening to the people of this country. Last Thursday, the Government suffered their worst county council election results ever, and their biggest by-election defeat for years. The Tory shires are down to just one. It is time for the Government

to show that they are ready to dispense with their usual arrogance and complacency, and that they are now prepared to listen.

The first thing that the Chief Secretary must tell us today is what changes he will make to his policy. He should announce that he will drop the proposal to put VAT on gas and electricity, and on charities: that proposal had no support in the country on Thursday, and it has no support now.

The Government have begun to talk of change——

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): May I interrupt the hon. Lady before she proceeds too far with her speech? Given that she is urging the Government not to introduce taxation, will she tell us specifically how she would reduce the public sector borrowing requirement?

Ms. Harman: The Government have allowed the PSBR to rise beyond their forecasts, and beyond the level to which they said they were prepared for it to go, because of the increase in unemployment and the lack of economic growth. Our proposals are intended to bring down unemployment, and to bring sustainable growth into the economy. That is how we intend to lower the PSBR; we do not intend to do so by making some of the poorest and most vulnerable people—such as the elderly—pay the price of the Government's incompetence.

What did the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) say in his election address to the people who he asked to vote for him? He did not say that he was worried about the public sector borrowing requirement; nor did he say that he would put up taxes to fill the hole in the public finances. He said, like all his Tory colleagues, that he would put down taxes. Hon. Members have had enough of the hypocrisy of Tory Members of Parliament who say one thing to their constituents before a general election and another thing after it.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am sure that the Committee accepts that the hon. Lady expresses genuine concern about the less well-off, but if we are to take her concern to be more than skin deep, will she remind the Committee of what happened to electricity prices between 1974 and 1979, in real terms and, more specifically, what the Labour Government did to help those who were less well-off?

Ms Harman: Under this Government, electricity and gas prices have risen faster than inflation. If the hon. Gentleman is as concerned as we are about the fuel bills of the elderly and families on low incomes, he will vote with us tonight to force the Government to keep their promises.

The Government have begun to talk about change, but talk, without the prospect of real change in Government policies—not just on VAT but on schools, rail privatisation and, above all, the economy.

The Prime Minister said on Friday that he would listen, that he had not been humiliated by the electorate and that it was an opportunity for him to learn. The Home Secretary admitted that the Government were in a dreadful hole, but on Sunday, speaking on BBC's "On the Record", the Chief Secretary was in his characteristically buoyant mood. Did he say that he would think again on VAT? Did he say that he would listen? No. Did he say that they had got it wrong? Did he say that they would listen? No, he did not.

Does the Chief Secretary even begin to recognise the insult that was felt by all those people who have lost their jobs or whose businesses have failed, when the Chancellor said that he had nothing to regret and then went on to hear, privately, Tory Members of Parliament say that the voters are a lagging indicator because they fail to recognise how rosy the economic prospects are? So it appears that the Chancellor regrets nothing. These are not the words of a Government who are prepared to listen but the epitaph of a Government who have been in power for too long.

We oppose the provision to put VAT on gas and electricity because it breaks a specific election promise that was made before the last general election in the most clear, specific and unequivocal terms.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will in a moment.

We oppose VAT on gas and electricity because that increase will affect everyone. Everyone has to use gas and electricity. It is a basic necessity. It is not some optional extra.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teinbridge): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: In a moment.

We also oppose it because it will hit hardest at the elderly and those on low incomes. We oppose it, too, because it will hit charities at a time when the help that they are giving is needed by a growing number of people but when donations are falling because of the recession. Furthermore, we oppose it because this VAT extension paves the way for further VAT extensions to children's clothes, newspapers and food.

Mr. Bowis *rose*——

Ms. Harman: Before I give way to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), perhaps he will tell the House whether he is one of those Tory Members of Parliament who, while saying nothing to his constituents, fills in survey forms saying that he is in favour of extending VAT to food, children's clothes and newspapers. Perhaps we shall have a bit of honesty in Committee from Tory Members of Parliament.

The Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), may I remind the Committee that this is a debate on the extension of VAT to fuel and power. It is not a debate on the extension of VAT to children's clothing.

Mr. Bowis: I am one of those Conservative Members of Parliament who recalls what happened in the past. Will the hon. Lady tell us what happened when the Labour Government put VAT on sweets, ice cream, crisps and soft drinks? Was that in her party's election manifesto? Was that promised beforehand? And what measures did her party introduce to protect the very people on low incomes, including children, who were affected by that step?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman need not delve too far back into his memory. He should cast his mind back to his own election address, in which he promised not to put up taxes but to cut them.

[Ms Harman]

In a letter sent today to panic-stricken Back Benchers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that it is necessary to put VAT on gas and electricity because it will set the economy to rights.

The crisis in public finance will not be resolved until we have policies that will build a strong economy and deliver sustainable economic growth. So instead of taxing pensioners on their fuel bills, the Government should direct their attention to training and skilling our work force to the same standard as our competitors, and to creating investment incentives so that we can begin to catch up with the investment levels of our competitors. They should attend to the crumbling social and economic infrastructure that holds our economy back, but instead they are imposing a flat rate tax on one of life's essentials. Everyone will pay.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the worst problems that are faced by the poor and the old are fuel poverty, fuel hardship and fuel misery, and does not evidence show that a higher proportion of Britain's elderly people die during the winter months than in other western European countries?

Will not the imposition of VAT make the position much worse for so many of our fellow citizens who even now cannot afford to keep their accommodation warm during the winter and who therefore find all kinds of reasons to go out and, when they are in, heat only one room? Is not their life one sheer misery during the winter and are not the Government making it worse?

Ms Harman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Conservative Members would do well to listen to the point that is being made not only by my hon. Friend but by organisations in their constituencies concerned with elderly and disabled people.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Ms Harman: If I may, I will press on and give way later, when, perhaps, the hon. Lady will tell us what she told her constituents in Lancaster about whether she would put VAT on gas and electricity.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Ms Harman: Are we about to have a moment of truth?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady seems to be suffering from selective amnesia. Has she forgotten—she was not here at the time—that, under the previous Labour Government, electricity prices rose by 2 per cent. every six weeks and that absolutely no help was offered to meet those increases?

Ms Harman: The trouble is that Conservative Members have selective amnesia about what they included in their election addresses.

Everyone will have to pay VAT on gas and electricity—even those who work but earn too little to pay income tax. Almost three quarters of pensioners pay no income tax, yet all of them will have to pay VAT on their gas and electricity bills. It is unfair, as the least well-off will be hardest hit by this tax.

For households that are fortunate enough to have more than £800 a week, the imposition of VAT on gas and electricity will increase their bills by only half of 1 per cent., whereas the budgets of households that struggle on less than £60 a week will be stretched by another 3 per cent. After VAT at the full rate of 17·5 per cent. is included, single pensioner households on income support—some of the poorest people in the country—will spend more than one fifth of their entire budget on heating bills.

This is a Government who do not think about what they are doing, who do not consult anyone about the effect of what they are doing and who do not listen to protests about what they are doing. They have had no discussions with organisations dealing with the elderly. If they had, they might have heard of the survey by Age Concern's institute of gerontology, which stated that pensioners often do not spend enough to heat their homes sufficiently, even to the level necessary to preserve their health. A third of pensioners surveyed did not heat their bedrooms, and nearly one quarter of those elderly people gave up other items to stay warm—mainly food. When we vote tonight, we should bear that in mind.

4 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, this country has a higher death rate from hypothermia than countries with much lower winter temperatures, such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland and that is because of poverty.

Age Concern was dismayed when it heard about the proposal, which came as a surprise because the Chancellor had not bothered to discuss it with the organisation. The average cost to a single pensioner will be £2 per week extra on fuel bills. There is also concern for families with children who are trying to live on a low income. In a letter to the Select Committee on Social Security, Barnardo's wrote:

"We already have contact with many hundreds of families across the UK who have difficulties with fuel payments for whom there are already daily decisions involving a choice such as whether to turn on the heat source or to buy food."

In this House, none of us is in that position, but when hon. Members vote tonight they should bear in mind the fact that they do not have to face that daily choice and that the lives of the people who do will be made worse if the measure is pushed through.

Disability Alliance has said:

"We fear that the imposition of VAT will have a devastating effect on disabled people."

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux is certain that if the measure is pushed through it will mean more debt and more disconnections.

If any Tory Back Benchers are wavering——

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: When I have finished my sentence.

Any Tory Backbenchers who are considering their position should think carefully before justifying the measure to themselves on the grounds that compensation will be in the pipeline in a few months' time. They should think carefully whether they can safely rely on that pledge from Ministers.

I shall give way to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on condition that he tells me whether he told his constituents that he would put 17·5 per cent. on the fuel bills of elderly people in his constituency.

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, and I am sure that she is right to lay such stress on

election manifestos. Will she identify which paragraph of which of the Labour party's two 1974 manifestos stated that it would put VAT on petrol, which is a fuel, and what it did to compensate motorists?

Ms. Harman: As there is a vote tonight on the plan to impose VAT on gas and electricity, people outside this House will wonder why their representative is not prepared to deal with the issue but instead seeks to make party political points relating to some years ago. The issue is serious.

Many Conservative Members are salving their consciences by telling themselves that it will be all right because the worst excesses of the tax will be offset by a compensation scheme further down the line. Let me remind hon. Members that the Government had not contemplated any extra compensation when they first took the decision—they were completely surprised by the outcry. Although there will be some compensation, we do not yet know the details, only that it will certainly not be full compensation, even for the poorest people in the country. Even those people will be made worse off.

If compensation is to be linked to income-related benefits, there will be two results. First, it will deepen the poverty trap; secondly, it will not reach all those who need it. We know that there is low take-up of income-related benefits. According to the Department of Social Security, as many as one in three pensioners who are entitled to income support do not claim it. Why should hon. Members believe the promises of compensation when nobody believes this Government's promises?

They said that they would not put VAT on gas and electricity. The Prime Minister said it, the Chancellor said it and members of the Cabinet said it. I hope that tonight, Tory Members will remember that they promised tax cuts in their election addresses. Why should a Government who promised tax cuts, but who have now put up taxes, be believed when they say: "Let us put VAT on gas and electricity now; trust us, and we will give you a compensation scheme in the autumn"? Tory Members should have demanded details of the compensation scheme to cushion the effect of VAT before voting tonight to put VAT on gas and electricity.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does the hon. Lady accept that I was one of the Conservative Members who asked for the Chancellor's statement to be clarified? The Chancellor made an excellent statement to help those on income-related benefits. Does the hon. Lady also accept that one of the reasons that I asked for that statement to be clarified was because we on the Conservative Benches have an excellent record of looking after pensioners? We did not do what the Labour party did in government in 1976, when Barbara Castle fiddled the calculation of old age pensions. The Conservative party will make sure that it does not go in for Labour party fiddles on pension increases.

Ms. Harman: It is true that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) asked for clarification and raised the question of compensation with the Chancellor. The problem is that he stopped short of ensuring that there would be full compensation. The hon. Gentleman faces tonight exactly the same situation that he was in before he raised queries with the Chancellor. He has no details of the so-called "compensation scheme", which, as yet, simply does not exist, but we have the certainty that it will not be full compensation. We have the absolute certainty that, if the scheme is agreed tonight, even the lowest-paid and those struggling on the lowest benefits will find that they are worse off as a result. The hon. Gentleman may have asked the question, but he failed to take note of the answer.

The question of the effect of VAT on gas and electricity on charities is of concern to hon. Members on both sides of the Committee. In his Budget statement, the Chancellor boasted of extra help for charities' but charities were horrified to discover that they too are to be hit by the imposition of VAT on gas and electricity—not just VAT on the gas and electricity used by their headquarters, or by their administration, but VAT on fuel for their day centres, for their residential homes, for their respite care, for their hospices, and for the meals on wheels and laundry services.

That is ironic, because the pattern of provision of the charity services is that it is in what were formerly known as the Tory shires—areas that elected many Conservative Members—that the charities, work is most important. Over the years, the Tory county councils have failed to build up their social services provision, so the charities have stepped in to provide residential care, domiciliary care and day centres. Therefore, the threats to charities, which say clearly that, if they have to give a great deal of money back in tax to the Government, they will have to cut their services, means that the people who will be worst affected are those who live in areas represented by Conservative Members.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): My hon. Friend will no doubt be aware of the figures provided by the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund. In 1992, that charity disbursed more than £3 million in patient grants, of which about £850,000 were grants for fuel, cancer being one of the conditions that requires its sufferers to be treated in conditions of warmth.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend draws attention to an irony: at the very time at which people will be looking to charities for more help with their fuel bills, charities will be in a worse position to help because of the tax that they will face on their own fuel bills.

The figures are significant. In answer to a parliamentary question tabled by me, the Government said that, next year, charities would have to give back £10 million in VAT. The year after, charities will have to give back to the Government £25 million in VAT. That is happening at a time when charities have seen their receipts from individual donors and from companies drop as a result of the recession.

The Charities Aid Foundation survey in December 1992 found that 64 per cent. of charities had experienced a real decrease in their total income since January 1991. Some 67 per cent. reported a fall in individual donations, and 61 per cent. a fall in corporate donations. At the same time, 90 per cent. said that their demand had increased due to higher unemployment, the fact that there were more people with debt and money problems and local authority cuts. Those were the three main reasons cited for the increased demand for charities' services.

The work of charities is important, and the Government should reconsider the imposition of tax on them. For that reason, we ask hon. Members to consider voting for amendment No. 5.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will the hon. Lady now give the House a pledge that the Labour party would remove VAT from heat and light if they won the next election?

Ms Harman: If the right hon. Gentleman shares our concern—I hope that he does—we need not get that far. He and other Conservative Members should join us today in voting for amendment No. 5 which would remove the requirement to pay VAT on gas and electricity from charities, which are doing such important work.

The Government have added insult to injury——

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I know that, if I do, he will ask about something that has nothing to do with the debate. I do not want you, Mr. Morris, to have to rule him out of order.

The Government have added insult to injury by claiming that this is an environmental measure. The use of gas and electricity is particularly insensitive to price. If it was simply an environmental measure, how could the Government justify putting VAT on charges for gas and electricity meters and on standing charges, which, by definition, do not vary with the amount of fuel used?

This is not a tax to deal with the hole in the ozone layer —perhaps we can lay that suggestion to rest. It is a tax to deal with the hole in the Government's economic policy. It is not a measure from a Government who have gone green; it is a measure from a Government who have gone into the red.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: This is an opportune moment for the hon. Gentleman to rise—although I shall not give way to him —as I was about to say that the knives were out on the Tory Back Benches. The Chancellor may be the ritual midsummer sacrifice. It is said that the Chief Secretary is being mentioned as possible successor; they say that he impresses. I would only say that it would be very hard indeed for anyone not to shine when standing next to the present Chancellor. But a reshuffle at the top and a few changing faces will change nothing and fool no one. On Thursday, the voters were saying not simply that they wanted someone different doing the job, but that they wanted the job done differently.

It is right that the Chancellor should go. He does not command the confidence of the country. His lack of credibility is yet another obstacle to our sustainable economic growth. But the voters in the shire counties and the voters in Newbury who gave their verdict on Thursday were protesting not only at the economic policies of the Chancellor, but at the economic policies of the Prime Minister.

4.15 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the people of Scotland had been given an opportunity to give their verdict on the Government's policy on VAT on Thursday, they would equally have given a resounding thumbs down? In Aberdeen, temperatures can be 4 deg lower than in the south of England in the winter. Is it not appropriate that the letter sent by the diocese of Edinburgh from the Scottish Episcopal Church speaks for people north and south of the border when it asks me and my colleagues in Scotland to register with the Government

"our concern at the way in which the proposed increase in heating costs by the addition of VAT will be felt most by people with low incomes"?

As the Church of England in Scotland is voicing those concerns, is it not appropriate that Tory Members who represent English constituencies take heed?

Ms Harman: One can understand why the Conservatives have no support in Scotland. But Conservative Members should ask why people in Scotland should suffer from the cold as a result of fuel poverty when people in areas with far lower temperatures in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland do not have to suffer the cold because they do not suffer fuel poverty.

On Sunday, the Chief Secretary rallied to the Chancellor's support. He said that the Chancellor was doing a magnificent job. He said that he was a magnificent Chancellor. He said that the Chancellor has been, is and will carry on doing a magnificent job. The Secretary of State for Social Security thinks that the Chancellor's magnificence is proved by the county council election results and the Newbury vote on Thursday.

The problem is that, for the Government, hypocrisy has become a way of life. The Government promised not to put VAT on gas and electricity, but they did. They say that they will not extend it to children's clothes or newspapers, but they secretly plan to do just that. They say that they will listen to the voters and respect their views. In private, they insult the electorate by calling them contemptuously "a lagging indicator".

Yesterday, the Home Secretary told us that the Government were in a dreadful hole. Tonight, Tory Members of Parliament have a chance to decide whether they will dig themselves and the Government deeper into that hole. Tonight, with their votes on VAT, on gas and electricity and on charities, Ministers will have a chance to show the people of Britain whether they are capable of change.

Tory Back Benchers will have the chance to show the people who elected them that, even if their Government cannot listen, perhaps they can. Even if their Government cannot be trusted, is it too much to hope for that Tory Back Benchers can? Back Benchers owe it to their constituents not to follow discredited Ministers like sheep through the Division Lobby.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): Following your ruling, Mr. Morris, that we may consider all the amendments together, I hope to address all the arguments that were raised by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

I wish to cover the question of Government finances, which provides the essential background to why the Government are proposing an extension of VAT. I wish also to discuss why the Government have chosen an extension of VAT as the means of raising part of the money that we need to raise. I certainly want to cover help for families and pensioners on low incomes, the question of standing charges, the question of charities and the environmental arguments. On my way through, I shall allude to some policies of other parties.

I begin by discussing the question of our public borrowing position, a serious matter which requires to be addressed. This year, we have a public sector borrowing

requirement which we are estimating at about £50 billion, which is 8 per cent. of GDP. At that level, it is the highest primary PSBR in the European Community. It is obviously extremely important that the Government should have policies—*[Interruption.]*—for tackling that level of borrowing.

I hear Opposition Members yelling, "Whose fault is it?" The PSBR has come about partly due to discretionary increases in spending by the Government, such as spending on the health service. At one time we were increasing spending on the health service by 4 and 5 per cent. in real terms every year, not a policy with which the Opposition disagreed. Indeed, I recall the hon. Member for Peckham, the present shadow Chief Secretary, urging us to spend more on health, education and all sorts of things.

Much of the PSBR has also been due to spending more on the unemployed, and I do not think the Labour party would want us to do other than that. A lot of it has been do do with the fall in revenue due to the recession, which has gone on for longer than anybody realised. The interest burden——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way in due course.

The interest burden that is accruing on those borrowings is also an important matter. Our interest burden is rising by about 9 per cent. in real terms every year. Over the next three or four years, the extra amount of interest alone that we must pay is likely to add about 1 per cent. to the ratio of public spending to GDP.

Over the next five years, assuming the tax increases proposed in the Finance Bill, assuming that we stick to our ceilings for public spending and assuming that we return to a rate of growth in the later years of 2·75 per cent., we still envisage in 1996-97 a PSBR of £35 billion or 4·5 per cent. of GDP. All the figures are in the Red Book published with the Budget.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way in due course.

The point I am making is that it is absolutely essential for the Government to tackle the PSBR, and the Chancellor has made clear in the Budget and in the Finance Bill the means by which he intends to do that. It requires next year £6·5 billion of revenue and, the following year, £10·5 billion of revenue. I believe that we are the only party which is prepared to take seriously the matter of public sector borrowing—*[Interruption.]* We still hear from the other parties a refusal to take such matters seriously.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said on BBC radio in January:

"I am not talking about increasing current borrowing. I am not talking about raising income tax or national insurance or VAT'.

So what on earth is he talking about, since he and his hon. Friends continue to talk about more public spending? The Liberal Democrats have suddenly discovered an interest in the PSBR. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) took the matter up with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently. It is a new-found interest of the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption.]* I think I hear the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) yelling "Nonsense." He was not yelling that in November when he said:

"What matters to Britain is not so much the level of borrowing. National debt is at an historic low."

It did not matter to him in March either, because in a publication entitled "The Budget Britain Needs", his party referred to

"a public investment programme funded by extra borrowing."

and said:

"We have argued quite deliberately that it is necessary for the Government to borrow money."

The interest of the Liberal Democrats in public borrowing is apparently very new-found.

For all those reasons, I claim that the Government are unique—*[Interruption]*—in being interested in tackling the PSBR.

Mr. Marlow: I am more than grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. He said that with good luck, a following wind and the help of the good fairy, by 1996-97 our deficit will be 4·5 per cent. of GDP. When does he expect us to meet the convergence critieria of the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Portillo: As my hon. Friend can see from the figures published in the Red Book, they would not be met in the period covered by the Red Book. That is the only answer that I can give my hon. Friend.

I have already dealt with the question of how the PSBR has got to where it is, but many of the Opposition arguments relate to the fact that the Government did not say at the time of the general election that they intended to raise VAT. The Opposition have suggested that the Government were in some way dishonest in not recognising that the recession would go on longer than anticipated. I remind the Committee that the Government were by no means alone in predicting that, throughout 1992, we would see growth in the economy of 1 per cent. Our forecast was very much in the middle of the range of those made by outsiders. We forecast 1 per cent. growth, the Confederation of British Industry forecast 1·7 per cent., the OECD forecast 2·2 per cent., James Capel forecast 1·7 per cent. and Credit Lyonnais forecast 1.7 per cent.

We forecast a PSBR of £28 billion—It has turned out to be higher than that—but the CBI forecast £18 billion, the European Commission forecast £19 billion, Goldman Sachs forecast £25 billion and James Capel forecast £24 billion. There were many other such forecasts. In other words, there is no basis for the Opposition to say that the Government could know, any more than anybody else, that the recession would last longer than we predicted at the time.

The important point is that the Government stand for sound public finances—that is what we have always put before the people of the country—and, because the recession has gone on for so long, we have an obligation to come to the House and propose measures for dealing with it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): If the Government are so concerned about the size of the deficit, why on earth did they squander at least £5 billion in an afternoon just to save the Chancellor's face?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady, I fear, has no understanding of these things. That money does not appear as public spending—it does not appear on the PSBR either—and has no effect on the figure in question.

[Mr. Portillo]

Why are the Government proposing to raise money from an extension of VAT? First, it is because VAT is an effective way in which to raise revenue and, by comparison with the rest of the European Community, this country has low rates and a very low range of coverage of VAT. In France, for example, the ratio of VAT to consumer spending is 13·4 per cent., in Germany it is 11·9 per cent., in Ireland 13·8 per cent., and in the United Kingdom it is only 9·6 per cent. We have one of the lowest ratios of VAT to consumer spending of any country in the EC.

The hon. Member for Peckham, a few moments ago, was citing the practice in Norway and Sweden as an example of what we ought to do. In Norway, the ratio of VAT to consumer spending is 16·6 per cent., and in Sweden it is 14·3 per cent. Both are vastly higher than the ratio of VAT to consumer spending in the United Kingdom, so the hon. Lady is well wide of the mark. She is right to say that those are colder countries—they also have more extensive VAT.

It is illogical for VAT to apply to commercial supplies and not to domestic supplies. We were extremely concerned in the Budget—at a time when we were anxious to make sure that the recovery could proceed and not be choked off by our measures—that we should not take measures that would hit incentives. Even in a Budget in which we had to raise taxes, we found the means to provide special help to business and raise taxes that did not hit businesses. We also found ways of raising more revenue that were consistent with our principle that we should broaden the base of our taxes rather than increase the rate. We should look to indirect taxes, rather than direct taxes which hit incentives in our economy. We saw VAT on fuel and power as an opportunity, not least because fuel prices in this country under privatisation have fallen by 8 per cent. in real terms since 1986.

We have also said—I want to make this very clear—that VAT has two effects. It will also help us to achieve our environmental commitments, which is different from saying that we have decided to raise VAT as a means, first and foremost, of achieving our environmental objectives. Of course VAT is intended to raise revenue to tackle public borrowing. However, what the hon. Member for Peckham and the Labour party seem incapable of understanding is that a single measure can achieve two objectives. VAT will both help the public sector borrowing requirement and help us to meet our environmental commitments, to which I shall return.

4.30 pm

Ms. Harman: Are we to understand from the right hon. Gentleman's comments about Norway that he does not accept that we have a higher rate of death from hypothermia in the winter than Norway, Sweden and Switzerland? Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he does not recognise that the higher death rate here is directly attributable to fuel poverty? Does he understand and accept that point?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady mistakenly thinks that such conditions are linked to VAT rates, but I have proved beyond doubt that they are not. As I said in my opening words, I shall deal later with fuel poverty.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: No, I shall not give way as I want to make progress.

The Government need to raise £6·5 billion and £10·5 billion over two years. We have considered how best to raise that money and have spread the load across all sectors of society. In 1995-96 we are looking to raise £10·5 billion, of which only £2·3 billion will come from the extension of VAT. The rest of that money will come from other measures such as tax changes on dividends, company cars and married couples' allowances—changes which will impact particularly on higher rate tax payers. It has been independently estimated by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that the Budget will spread the inevitable need for an increase in revenue across all sectors of society and not, as the Opposition would have hon. Members believe, to pile it on the poorest.

Extending VAT certainly has an effect on the poorest, and I shall deal with that issue in two sections as I know that there is much concern about it in the Committee—first, in relation to the poorest and, secondly, in relation to pensioners. Those are two different groups, although they overlap.

Mr. Nicholls: When my right hon. Friend deals with those two points in that order, will he bear in mind the fact that merely helping the neediest—the pensioners—through income support will not necessarily help those pensioners who need special help? If we are to broaden the bases, we must understand that the elderly may well need help. Merely saying, as we so often do, that income support will help those in need, and the other pensioners will not need it, will not for one moment satisfy the needs in this case.

Mr. Portillo: If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I shall make it clear that I want to talk about that very issue.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way for a general question on that before he moves on to another topic?

Mr. Portillo: No.

I want to talk about our record on helping the poor. Last October the Government raised the income support rates for pensioners by £2 for a single person and £3 for a couple. That was one piece of direct help to people who are the poorest and who are pensioners. The Committee will be aware that from April this year, no one on income support is any longer required to contribute to local taxation. The amounts that have been included wihin income support for the contribution to local taxation were £1·60 for a single person and £2·80 for a couple.

Dr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: No.

Those amounts are greater than the amounts being speculated that people on income support will have to pay extra on their fuel bills as a result of the extension of VAT, even at the full rate of 17·5 per cent. which will not take effect for two years. Those are important changes and I shall tell the Committee how they work out.

A single unemployed person over 25 on income support has had his average disposable weekly income increased by £3·15 a week, and the disposable income of an 80-year-old couple on income support is now £9·35 more on average than it was last April. That means that, for the first time,

the income support for those people has now moved over £100 a week. It may be that the increases that the Government have made in their help to the poorest people have been so numerous and so large that the Committee is out of touch.

Let me remind the Committee that the higher pensioner premium for those on income support now stands at £23·55 for a single person and £33·70 for a couple who are over 80 or disabled. Those are additional benefits given to those people to take care of their special needs and it is worth bearing them in mind.

Dr. Berry *rose*——

Mrs. Margeret Ewing (Moray) *rose*——

Mr. Connarty *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: Despite all that I have said, we undertook to give extra help to the poorer pensioners and to those people on income-related benefits and to increase the cold weather payments. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Peckham said, it was included in the Budget statement and stated by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on Budget day.

We made it clear that extra help would be available before the first fuel and power bills with VAT arrive next April and that the exact nature of what we intended to do would be included in the autumn uprating statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security who is obliged by statute to take everything into account in deciding what the appropriate uprating should be.

I now turn to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). I know that he is concerned about pensioners who are not on income support as well as those who are.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: Perhaps I could remind him of some of the Budget arithmetic. We need to bear in mind the fact that it is necessary to raise revenue to deal with the public sector borrowing requirement, and that VAT on fuel and power will raise £2·3 billion in 1995-96. Out of that, automatically through the effect on the retail prices index, and the effect of that on the uprating of benefits, there will be £300 million spent in 1995-96 and £600 million in 1996-97. That is absolutely without reference to the extra help that I referred to previously.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: In a moment.

Our record on pensioners is also a good one. Pensioners' average income has risen by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Following an amendment, or an innovation brought in by the Labour Government, we now offer all people during their working life times the opportunity to be in SERPS or to be contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into an occupational or personal pension scheme.

In April, thanks to our success in reducing inflation, the uprating of pensions was 3·6 per cent. whereas the retail prices index figure for April was 1·9 per cent. The effect of that on a pensioner couple's income is compensation of £1·60 over and above the retail prices index. Opposition Members may sneer, but that is very close to the amount which it is speculated the extra cost of VAT on fuel and power will come to when the full 17·5 per cent. rate comes into effect in two years' time.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: I have promised to give way to some other hon. Friends, and I have already given way to my hon. Friend once.

We have a problem, in that we have scarce resources which we therefore need to be able to target. Wherever we draw the line between those who are defined as in special need, because they are in poverty, and others, there will always be people just above that line whom my hon. Friends will believe to be especially deserving.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: We must also recognise that there are benefits, such as housing benefit and council tax benefit, which are payable to people who are not on income support. One and a half million pensioners will benefit from what we have already announced, and we intend to go on giving extra help to the poorest people. One and a half million pensioners who are not on income support will benefit through council tax benefit and housing benefit —2·25 million households in all will benefit, including the 1·5 million pensioners.

It is necessary to draw lines somewhere. I believe that it would be unrealistic to give extra help to all pensioners over and above the RPI effect. I remind my hon. Friends that pensioners will benefit from that effect. If we were to take extra measures to try to identify the impact of fuel bills over and above the RPI effect felt by pensioners and all others, we might be talking about another £1 billion on benefits. My hon. Friends will recognise that that would wash away a great deal of the revenue being raised in this way——

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Is it in order for the Chief Secretary to address the House with this posture? He seems to be arranged in such a way that he can see all who want to intervene and are sitting behind him but none of those in front of him. Would it be possible to ask you to ask the Chief Secretary to adjust his crooked posture?

The Chairman: I am grateful that, for once, an hon. Member is addressing the Chair.

Mr. Portillo: I give way again to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge.

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for dealing specifically with this point. I hope that he can clarify another point for me. He has referred to the fact that rebates on council tax can take account of the circumstances of a pensioner who, although not on income support, clearly needs help. Am I right in thinking that the amount of rebate available through that mechanism was set without reference to the impact that VAT on fuel bills will have? Surely, if that is the mechanism to be used to help these pensioners, there should be some flexibility for building into the calculation the fact that they now face extra bills at a time when many of them are already having their incomes cut by depreciating interest rates.

Mr. Portillo: All pensioners, whether on income support or not, will be compensated for the impact on the

[Mr. Portillo]

retail prices index of extending VAT to fuel and power. In addition, those on income-related benefits will be compensated, especially and in advance. Whereas it is generally believed that there are people above the income support line who might also require some help, it is perhaps not always realised that 1·5 million pensioners who are not on income support will receive compensation through the uprating of benefits due to the RPI, and extra help because their council tax benefit and their housing benefit will be adjusted, by means of the special help that we are discussing.

Mr. Stern: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will allow me to pursue the point a little. Many people, not necessarily pensioners, live in hard-to-heat homes and are trapped in those houses either because they are council tenants or because they suffer from negative equity. Their council tax benefit or housing benefit, if any, bears no relation to the fact that their fuel costs are much higher than average. In the scheme of compensation that my right hon. Friend is planning, will he take those facts into account so that people will not inadvertently lose out because, for instance, they moved into a Parkinson house, from which the heat leaks away through the walls?

4.45 pm

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend draws attention to a well-known difficulty. When we moved from supplementary benefit to income support, we did not think it right to continue the whole range of special payments made to people in various circumstances—the so-called single payments. Since then, we have relied heavily on identifying the people who have the greatest need to heat their homes: the elderly and the very elderly, who attract premiums under income support, the disabled who do the same, and those with children who also attract them. That is how we have dealt with the problem on the basis of many years of experience.

Dr. Berry: Will the Chief Secretary recognise that the reason why pensioners and many other people are angry about what is happening is that on 27 March last year the Prime Minister clearly said:

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT"?

Was that statement based on ignorance, dishonesty or both?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman's question was clearly based on ignorance, as I dealt with it in the first part of my speech.

Mrs. Browning: I must draw my right hon. Friend's attention back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) about pensioners and people who are not on income-related benefits. My right hon. Friend has said that it would be impossible to make any alteration in the RPI calculation, but that calculation will be a national average which does not take into account the disproportionate amount of money spent on fuel by retired people and people with disabilities. In the west country, the additional benefits that he has mentioned—from council tax benefit, for instance—have been sopped up by the additional charges that people have had to pay for water, so this will hit them particularly hard.

If my right hon. Friend, within the RPI formula, were to take account of those much higher charges and the money were paid to pensioners on higher incomes, he would at least recoup the money through the tax system, because pensioners with higher incomes pay tax like everyone else. That would at least ensure that pensioners who do not have income-related benefits but who are not exactly well off have their fuel charges covered.

Mr. Portillo: It is well understood that what most concerns us is that we should compensate pensioners through the RPI; but the amount that many of them spend on fuel and power may figure disproportionately in what they spend. There is a great danger, however, in seeking to compensate people for particular items of expenditure. We have always sought to raise benefits by the retail prices index, or by the Rossi index, according to what was right. If, since 1979, we had looked at the things that pensioners spend most money on, we would have excluded from their index mortgage interest payments, because pensioners do not spend much on them. The result would have been, as the Secretary of State for Social Security has pointed out several times, that today's pension would be £6·65 less than it is. That would have been the result of picking and choosing our way through the index, trying to find out what pensioners spend their money on.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): This leaves us in an odd position. I will still have to tell pensioners in my constituency, "I am sorry that you will not get any help —but if you went to the Royal Opera House, you would get help, because the Government subsidise it to the tune of £30 per seat per show." Why do we subsidise people's pleasure to the tune of £700 million while punishing pensioners at the other end of the scale? If my right hon. Friend cut out overseas aid and subsidies for the arts tomorrow, there would be no need to be doing any of this.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend certainly anticipates some of the arguments that will arise during a very difficult public spending round indeed. He talked about penalising people for saving. It is a very difficult problem: how to devise a benefit system which, on the one hand, provides a safety net for people—which means that we have to have an income-related system and to be aware of their means and capital—and, on the other hand, avoids excessively penalising people who have shown thrift throughout their lives. Those are serious problems which cannot be solved easily.

We are, of course, now committed to embarking on a review of social security and to looking at the balance between targeting and universal benefit. These are genuinely difficult problems, and the questions that my hon. Friends are raising about the people who are just above the income support level are obviously questions which we shall have to think about very carefully indeed.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Does my right hon. Friend not appreciate that, despite all his talk about second pensions, about 1·5 million to 2 million people, many of them living in their own homes, so that they do not get any housing benefit, do not have a second pension and very often have no extra income at all? Is he aware that, on the night when the original Budget resolutions

were put, I asked our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there would be recognition of the plight of that sector of the community, and he said that of course there would. Does my right hon. Friend accept that what he explained this afternoon falls a long way short of reassuring me about the fate of those people who do not have that extra income? Would he like to comment on that?

Mr. Portillo: If my hon. Friend reads what I have said, he will not reach that conclusion. I have pointed out that the retail prices index will be adjusted, and that will be of general help to pensioners. I have pointed out that we will give special help to people on income-related benefits; that 1·5 million pensioners and 2·25 million households altogether, above the income support level will benefit; and that 8 million households altogether will benefit from special measures that we are taking.

The people to whom my hon. Friend refers as living on their own may none the less be in receipt of council tax benefit. If they have only their state pension, and no occupational pension, they will certainly be on income-related benefit. That is where I believe the help should be concentrated, because we have a system that identifies the people who are most in need and brings help to them.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I really do want to get on. We are in Committee and there will be time for hon. Members to make their points.

Turning to the question of standing charges, VAT is normally chargeable on the whole of a charge——

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: No, I have already given way to my hon. Friend.

VAT is normally chargeable on the whole of a charge for supply, both the fixed and the variable element. If we were to exclude standing charges from VAT that would mean a substantial reduction in the revenue and we would then have to seek that revenue elsewhere. It would be administratively extremely inefficient to exclude standing charges, and it would certainly mean that in the long term the industries would be given the opportunity to restructure the way in which they charged people in order to avoid VAT falling on their supplies.

However, most important of all, perhaps, is that the effect of what the Opposition are proposing would be no help to the people in most need —that is, the people who pay for their electricity and gas supplies through slot meters. They are often the poorest people, and many have smaller standing charges than other people. Therefore, paradoxically and perversely, what the Opposition are proposing would, I believe, leave those people in the worst position of all.

The general approach of the Government to charities is that we should give tax relief for all those who wish to give to charity, rather than seek to give relief to charities on the items that they purchase. The advantage of that is that the charities that are best able to attract public support are the ones which get the subsidy from the taxpayer. It is extremely difficult to sort out the purchases that are made by charities from those that are made by other taxpayers.

The hon. Member for Peckham said that the extension of VAT to charities would affect them by £25 million. I should like to put that in some sort of context by pointing out to the Committee that tax relief on charitable giving is now running at over £900 million a year.

The Government have a magnificent record of introducing reforms that have been of particular help to charities. In 1980, for example, we introduced a reduction in the length of time that a covenant to a charity had to run from seven to four years. In 1987, we introduced payroll giving, and we introduced gift aid in 1990. According to the latest figures, £307 million has now been contributed through gift aid. We are now spending £2·68 billion on the voluntary sector. All these figures absolutely dwarf the one that the hon. Member for Peckham mentioned.

None the less, we were well aware that, under this Budget, charities would have to pay more in VAT, and we therefore sought a reform within the Finance Bill that would be of benefit to charities. We have extended payroll giving and gift aid, and the benefit of that is about £30 million, which broadly matches the impact of VAT on charities through fuel and power. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) says from a sedentary position that it is different charities, but the Opposition are proposing the maintenance of an exemption for charities that would mean that Eton college, for example, would continue to benefit from VAT relief. Indeed, for all I know, Eton college might benefit more than Help the Aged from VAT relief. The Labour party is proposing that we should set up arbitrary distinctions between, for instance, care homes that are run in the private sector and those that are run by charities.

I therefore believe that the Committee will agree that the Government have set out in the Finance Bill to provide an equivalent measure of compensation for charities to enable them to cope with the extra imposition of VAT.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. Friend rightly makes the point that there are different kinds of charities. It might be sensible to consult the charities on how they would like their tax relief. Is he aware that there is a particular kind of charity, particularly in rural and semi-rural constituencies—village halls? Many of us have had a large number of letters from village halls about the concern that is felt regarding what they may have to pay next year or the year after because of VAT on fuel. I appreciate that we are dealing with a hypothetical situation, because nobody knows what will happen to the prices of electricity and gas over the next two or three years. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to listen very sympathetically to representations from Conservative Members—and, no doubt, Opposition Members—on behalf of village halls, if they get into difficulty as a result of VAT on fuel?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes a most interesting point. As he says, time will tell and perhaps we can learn from experience. He may have had in his mind, when he asked the question, a point that I had already made—that fuel prices have been falling recently and we are looking at phasing in this increase over two years. But we will, of course, look very carefully at the impact of the change on village halls.

Ms Harman *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: Yes, I have been on my feet a long time, and I will give way.

Ms Harman: Will the Chief Secretary recognise that, even leaving on one side the drop in donations to charities by individuals and companies, the effect of the Budget is to cut income to charities? Although, as he has mentioned, they will get additional relief from payroll giving and gift aid, they will lose out on VAT on their gas and electricity, and they will also see a drop in their income from dividends because of the reduction in relief for advance corporation tax? While the Government estimate that that will be about £50 million, the charities estimate that it will cost them about £100 million.

5 pm

Mr. Portillo: The dividends come under a separate clause, but the hon. Lady needs to bear in mind that what we are talking about in that clause is a reduced rate of compensation for a tax liability that does not arise for charities. Charities are exempt from taxes on their income and at the moment they are getting a credit on their dividends, which they can cash in. Obviously, reducing the rate of credit reduces their income. That is why the hon. Lady will discover within those provisions, when we reach them, special transitional arrangements for charities to help them with that.

Environmental questions have been raised. As I have said previously, the Bill is intended to raise revenue; there are no two ways about that. It also helps significantly to achieve our environmental commitments. The 150 countries that were signatories to the Rio convention signed up to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to their 1990 level by the year 2000. We predict that we need to reduce our carbon emissions by 10 million tonnes by the year 2000 or by about 6 per cent.

We have taken a range of measures to bring that about, some of which are directed to better fuel efficiency. They include the setting up of the Energy Savings Trust, which is to bring together the Government, British Gas and the electricity supply industry under the chairmanship of my noble Friend, Lord Moore, to find schemes that will enhance energy efficiency and make grants for those schemes. We are putting our trust in that body to achieve carbon reductions of 2·5 million tonnes on that programme alone.

The VAT increase that we are talking about and the increase in petrol prices that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned in the Budget will each achieve carbon reductions of 1·5 million tonnes. That will leave a gap of 3 million tonnes of carbon for the Government to be able to meet the commitments that they made at the Rio convention. I know that it has been suggested that the gap should be filled by way of a carbon tax. I think that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General may wish to say something about that when he winds up. I would simply say that there are considerable doubts about the efficacy or appropriateness of a carbon tax. We will have to consider such factors extremely carefully as discussions progress within the EC.

I commend the VAT proposals to the Committee. I have been astonished by the way in which Opposition parties have criticised the Government on this when, in the past, they wished to extend VAT and made their wishes clear. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, for example, always wriggles when this quote is mentioned to him, but he knows perfectly well that a Liberal party document called "Costing the Earth" said:

"The Liberal Democrats advocate as a first priority the imposition of a tax on energy . . . The UK is unusual amongst EC members in not applying even standard rates of VAT on domestic fuels . . .. . . if it proved completely impossible to persuade our international partners to adopt energy taxes, we would nevertheless press forward . . . by ending the anomalous zero rate of VAT on fuel."

That really could not be clearer.

Mr. Beith *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to say that it was only a Green Paper and not Liberal party policy, he may say so and we shall treat that comment with our customary derision.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that that document was not party policy and did not become so? If he would like to have the Conservative party election manifesto compared with ours and see which party is sticking to its manifesto, that would do for us.

Mr. Portillo: My predictions about what the right hon. Gentleman would say were absolutely correct.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Has my right hon. Friend read a little further into Liberal party documents? Not only does "Costing the Earth" contain the quotations that he used, but "Policy Briefing 22", which came out in October 1991, gave the same commitment. "Changing Britain for good", which was the manifesto on which the party fought the election, says:

"Our new Energy Tax is this manifesto's key proposal in this area."

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes his point supremely well. He has set the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed gibbering with fury that he has been discovered.

The Labour party has been just the same, from top to bottom. The Leader of the Opposition said in his election address when he was seeking to be elected leader of the party:

"We should consider the increased use of the fiscal system to promote environmental protection and conservation."

What did he mean by that if he did not mean taxes on fuel?

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said in *Green Magazine* in February that he believed in increasing VAT on environmentally unfriendly products. He went further and said:

"If I was Secretary of State now I would twist the Chancellor's arm right up his back to see these measures implemented."

We know that the Labour party spokesman in the House of Lords, Lord Desai, who has now been fired, said in *Tribune* on 6 May:

"I would remove zero rating for VAT on all items."

What was so extraordinary, as the House saw on Thursday, was that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in Treasury Question Time, used that quote and made it clear that it came from *Tribune* that day. A moment later, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister mentioned the quote and the Leader of the Opposition said that it came from the days when Lord Desai was not an Opposition spokesman. I have never seen anyone fall more clearly into a trap. Sitting next to him were the hon. Members for Peckham and for Dunfermline, East, both of whom knew that the quote came from *Tribune* that day. However, neither of them cared to warn the Leader of the Opposition about the trap into which he was walking.

It is extraordinary that *Tribune* is never read. It has reached the position that television reached for Noel Coward, who said that television was a thing for appearing on, not a thing for watching. Now it appears that *Tribune* is a thing for writing in but not something for Labour party members to read.

The hon. Members for Peckham and for Dunfermline, East led their general straight into a disaster and sent him charging off between the trenches. They knew that that quote was current and of the day, but they let the Leader of the Opposition fall into that trap. With a general misled by his brigadiers, the Labour party's response was to fire the corporal. Poor Lord Desai has now been sacked as a spokesman in the House of Lords. On behalf of all my right hon. and hon. Friends, let me say that we shall miss him greatly.

The humiliation that the Leader of the Opposition suffered on Thursday, the rout that he endured in the House of Commons, led him, over the weekend, suddenly to stir up a campaign on VAT on fuel and power. That from a Labour party which has never once addressed the question of public borrowing or committed itself to controlling public spending. The Government are prepared to face up to those serious issues. We understand that, in order to control public borrowing and to pursue a responsible fiscal policy, we have to take unpopular decisions. Only a natural party of opposition—the Labour party—could believe that one can govern without any pain and that it is possible to get control of public borrowing without taking unpopular decisions.

The Conservative party is committed to responsible government and sound public finances. It is willing to take the decisions necessary. Therefore, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to resist the amendments.

Mr. Beith: I do not know how the Government have the face to go ahead with their proposals after Thursday's result in Newbury. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who is sitting beside me, received the votes of more than 37,000 electors, who expressed their anger about this and other aspects of Government policy so clearly and decisively that a Government who were listening and learning would have asked the House today for time to reconsider the fuel tax proposal and to come up with a better way of dealing with the hole that they have created in the public finances.

The Government go on at us about the state of those finances, but it was they who secured the prolonging of the recession and they who said that it would not last so long. According to their manifesto and their election campaign, recovery would come as soon as the ballot boxes had closed on polling day and it was clear that they would remain in power. It was they who insisted that they did not and would not need new taxes. We made no such claim; we evinced no such bravado about the ability of Government to survive without new taxes, or tax increases, in any circumstances.

All the Chief Secretary's talk this afternoon about how only a natural party of government like the Conservative party ever considers unpopular measures such as raising taxes is absolute nonsense. There was not a word about that during the general election campaign, which was all about lowering taxes. It was we who said that, in some circumstances, we would be prepared to raise them, if there was a strong and legitimate case for doing so.

We heard none of that from the Government; but, during the Newbury by-election campaign, we heard plenty on the doorsteps about the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and power. We collected thousands of signatures from people who objected strongly to the proposal, and those of us who were canvassing the local elections around the country heard the same message time and again.

If the Government are listening and learning, to what and to whom are they listening and what have they learnt? They do not appear to be listening to their own Back Benchers, who have expressed doubt and concern about aspects of their proposals. Some pertinent questions have been raised this afternoon.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I am almost reluctant to give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he has got in twice already. However, I shall do so.

Mr. Nicholls: In that spirit of friendship, I wanted to give the right hon. Gentleman an opportunity to disown what was said in his own party's Green Paper and election manifesto—that the Liberal Democrats were in favour of putting a tax on energy. Will he take that opportunity and disown the pledges that were given then?

Mr. Beith: On the contrary, I shall take the opportunity to read the proposal which another hon. Member misquoted so ludicrously. We said in our manifesto that we would

"support a Community-wide energy tax on all energy sources . . . related to levels of carbon dioxide emitted".

We said that that would

"provide a strong incentive for saving energy and investing in cleaner sources. Extra revenue raised through the tax will be fed back into the economy reducing other taxes such as VAT".

That is the part that the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) did not quote—the proposal to reduce VAT.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No. If the hon. Gentleman ever quotes me accurately, I shall be prepared to listen to his interventions. Moreover, I have not finished the quotation; apparently, the hon. Gentleman does not wish to hear the rest of it.

We said that we would act by

"reducing other taxes such as VAT and by protecting those least able to adapt to the higher price of energy."

Not only our manifesto, but even the "Costing the Earth" document—which did not become party policy—contained a string of proposals to invest in energy efficiency: to invest resources in the communities that found it most difficult to cope with high energy costs. It is ludicrous to quote a proposal to reduce VAT as if it were a proposal to increase VAT.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh) *rose*——

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr) *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I shall give way later, when it is less difficult to choose which Conservative intervention to take. The Chief Secretary argued—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I will give way after all, to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Sir Teddy Taylor: To maintain the high standard of honesty claimed by the Liberal Democrats, will the right hon. Gentleman make it abundantly clear—not only to the voters of Newbury—that, no matter how much money the Liberal Democrats might gain through a new energy tax, that money could not be used to cut VAT? If the Government's proposals are accepted, a future Labour or Liberal Democrat Government will be able to do nothing about it.

Will the right hon. Gentleman at least make it clear that VAT cannnot be reduced, because of EC obligations which I thought his party supported? I am not attacking him; I am merely asking him to tell the people the truth. Then his party might get on even better.

Mr. Beith: I do not agree. It is possible for any member country to have different VAT rates from the rest of the Community. A number of member countries have far lower rates than our existing 17·5 per cent. and it is open to us to apply lower rates to various of the commodities on which that rate is now levied.

However—as the hon. Gentleman well knows—it appears that, under Community law, if we surrender the zero rate on fuel tonight, we shall never be able to restore it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue to remind Ministers that their proposal appears to constitute an irrevocable removal of the zero rate—one that they cannot go back on. That is another argument for not surrendering the zero rate to raise more money and for devising a more effective form of energy taxation.

This is not, and was not intended to be, a genuine energy tax. The Chancellor made it clear to the Treasury Select Committee that the primary motive for the proposal was to raise revenue, and the Chief Secretary devoted much of his speech to explaining the reasons why that was necessary. No money from this tax will increase energy efficiency. It is not a device to transfer money from energy users to measures that will lead to less use of energy. It is indiscriminate: it draws no distinction between energy raised by coal burning and that raised by oil burning, wind power or tidal forces. All are treated in exactly the same way. This is not a serious energy measure.

5.15 pm

The tax will be applied not only to energy used, but to the fixed standing charge, which bears no relation to the amount of energy that a person uses. How can it be an energy tax designed to encourage people to use less energy, when it applies to an amount over which their use of energy exercises no control? Moreover, by and large, it is not targeted at people who have much choice about how much energy they use.

Many who will be hardest hit by the tax do not have control over the energy efficiency of their homes, because they do not own them—or, as a Conservative Member pointed out, because they are victims of negative equity, stuck in their houses without the resources to make them more energy-efficient. Often, they have not the means to do so either: they cannot afford to take out an extra mortgage and put some capital into real energy efficiency improvements.

No new resources will come from this measure to be directed at some of the valuable schemes that exist, such as the neighbourhood energy action schemes—schemes that are making a limited but extremely valuable contribution to improve energy efficiency. Many more resources would be needed to offset the effects of the tax on vulnerable groups.

We know that poorer households spend a larger proportion of their income on fuel. A study by the university of York suggested that the tax will lead to single pensioner households spending over 20 per cent. of their budget on fuel following the introduction of the 17·5 per cent. rate. The 1991 family expenditure survey showed that, even then, the poorest 20 per cent. spent 11 per cent. of their total income on fuel; the average was 5 per cent. and for the richest it was only 3 per cent.

Poorer people are more likely to live in rented accommodation and to be unable to improve insulation very much. They are less likely to have central heating and more likely to use pre-payment meters, which generally mean higher standing charges. I have yet to find out precisely how the VAT system will affect those who have to buy tokens for such meters, but it will almost certainly disadvantage them.

Winter Action on Cold Homes estimates that, of the 7 million households that rely on social security for most of their income, only 13 per cent. have energy-efficient homes, nearly 50 per cent. have no central heating and only a third have adequate loft insulation. All the organisations that know most about the matter have spoken out vigorously. The citizens advice bureaux have expressed concern about the potential increase in the number of people disconnecting themselves from their electricity supply. The Child Poverty Action Group has opposed the measure and pensioner's organisations such as Age Concern—along with organisations representing the disabled—have spoken of the likely impact on those whom they know best.

Families with children, on average, have higher fuel bills as a proportion of income, especially single parents and those with young babies. The unemployed are likely to spend more time at home and hence will have higher fuel bills. Those with chronic sickness and disability spend more time indoors and so have higher fuel costs. They often need extra heating in any case—and extra hot water, if they need to bath or wash clothes more often as a result of a number of health conditions.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): My right hon. Friend has mentioned health conditions. Does he agree that, if people cannot heat their homes to keep warm, problems will be caused for hospitals, which will have to take on even more cases than they have at present? I met members of the Rochdale pensioners association this morning and I know that many of my constituents are desperately worried. They fear that, if they cannot keep warm, they will eventually have to go into hospital.

Mr. Beith: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Many ill-thought-out measures which bear hard on one group show up in the public expenditure requirements somewhere else, sooner or later. They lead to precisely what my hon. Friend has said, and in the end lead to higher costs for the national health service in another area. That is only part of the argument. What is much worse is that it involves a deterioration in pensioners' health. We do not want them in hospital in the first place, but it turns out to be a false economy if the result is higher costs for the NHS.

My hon. Friend speaks for a constituency in the north of England. My constituency is even further north than

hers. Those of us who represent colder parts of the country —Scotland, Wales and the north of England, exposed parts of the country and remote communities—know how much our constituents will be affected by this proposal.

Mr. Gallie: I, too, have a constituency in the north of the country. If all those people are going to suffer, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, why does he still push his carbon tax? Did the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends support the coal industry recently? Would not a carbon tax hit all the people to whom he referred? Would it not amount to a great penalty on the coal industry?

Mr. Beith: As the hon. Gentleman knows, because he knows the electricity industry particularly well, that industry is expecting and will have to face higher taxation of energy, but to make any sense it has to be directed at the environmental objectives which the Government have accepted. It must not be indiscriminate. It has to be managed in such a way that it is not visited most heavily upon those who can least afford it. That is our double objection to the VAT proposals.

The hon. Gentleman is not facing reality if he assumes —I am sure that he does not, because he is involved with the industry—that there will be no increase in energy taxation. He should face that reality and encourage his hon. Friends to accept only a European energy tax which is directed at the saving of energy, where we can save it, and which at the same time is accompanied by measures to ensure that those who can least afford the impact to be hard on them are properly protected and helped. None of those objectives is satisfied, as the previous exchanges demonstrated.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that a better way to tackle the problem is to encourage—perhaps by tax breaks of a different sort —incentives that are aimed at introducing greater efficiency in the use of energy? Sometimes that involves large tax breaks for people who are prepared to invest large amounts of money in efficiency-saving technology and devices rather than the imposition of a carbon tax.

Mr. Beith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should give tax incentives for energy efficiency measures. We have argued that case in debates on successive Budgets. He must see the inherent absurdity of putting VAT on domestic fuel and still charging it on the various means by which pensioners could reduce their fuel bills.

The implication of the hon. Gentleman's question is also right: there are areas—industry, for example, which already has to pay VAT on fuel—where significant energy savings could be made if there were sufficient economic incentive to make them. They would result in far greater energy savings than can be made by pensioners in their homes, certainly under a system that provides them with so little help to make savings.

To complete the list of those who will be particularly badly affected by VAT on fuel and power, some people cannot claim income-related benefit; many pensioners are above income support level; students usually live in rented accommodation and have minimal control over its energy efficiency. Those of us who have lived in student accommodation can remember stuffing silver paper in the cracks of the doors to keep out the draught, and the various other simple energy efficiency measures that we had to adopt. Any group of people who are not entitled to income-related benefit and who are likely to be living in energy-inefficient accommodation will suffer particularly badly from this proposal.

What was also noticeable in the local elections was the resentment of many people on low incomes and of pensioners who have a small additional income, who find that they will have to bear the full cost of VAT on fuel and power. They will not be compensated in any way. A great many of those people voted for us in the local elections.

Mr. Ian Bruce: When did the Liberal Democrat party decide to ditch its intellectually honest document "Costing the Earth", which specifically stated that exceptions could not be made, even in the case of people on low incomes, and that their cases would have to be dealt with through the social security system? I will give the right hon. Gentleman the quotation later. Clearly, he has not read his own document. Does he acknowledge that the Government, by means of the non-fossil fuel levy for electricity, have dealt with non-fossil fuel subsidy? As the right hon. Gentleman wants to deny that policy, what does he expect his energy tax percentage to be when it is first levied?

Mr. Beith: Our policy was made clear in our general election manifesto—as, we presumed, was the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party. The Conservative party's policy was that there was no need for any additional taxation of energy, or for additional taxation of any kind whatsoever. Although the hon. Gentleman, and others, attacked us for proposing modest increases in the taxation of petrol, even though our proposals contained many compensation elements for those who would be affected by them, we stated honestly that we thought that an increase would be necessary. However, the Government have put up the price of petrol by more than we proposed. The hon. Gentleman says nothing about that and makes no complaint about it. Comparisons should be made on the basis of what we put before the electorate at the general election.

Mr. Milligan: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No, I must get on with my speech.

Other groups will be particularly badly affected by this proposal. They, too, will not be adequately compensated. Compensation, for example, that is determined by the basket of items that form the means of assessing the retail prices index will not compensate a family or pensioners for the cost of the tax on fuel. There are further problems with income-related benefits. Many people who qualify for them do not take them up. That is another reason why income-related benefits will not lead to adequate compensation.

I mentioned earlier another reason why the Government are unwise to proceed in this way. It is fairly clear that European law does not provide for the zero rating on fuel and power that we have enjoyed until now. Our ability to enjoy a zero rating rests upon the fact that we already have it. The Government are willingly and deliberately surrendering this exemption at a stroke, with no prospect of reintroducing it. They must therefore intend to keep VAT at this level on fuel and power. They obviously have no doubts about it.

Mr. Marlow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No, I must get on.

[Mr. Beith]

We have offered a number of amendments that would enable us to retain VAT exemption. We have tabled fallback amendments, by means of which we invite Conservative Members who insist upon going down this road at least to limit VAT on fuel and power to a smaller amount—for example, to 5 per cent.—or at least not to go from 8 to 17·5 per cent. However, that is only a second best. It would be far better not to lose the exemption.

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman says that under European law we are constrained with regard to taxes on energy. Can he tell us which instrument was passed by the House of Commons which gave the Europeans that authority and whether he was aware of that fact at the time?

Mr. Beith: I would not presume to offer an answer to that question without checking, first, the sources and references, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with me—unusually, because we normally disagree—on the point that the surrender of this zero exemption is likely to be irreversible and that that is presumably what the Government intend. Therefore I invite Conservative Members not to let the Government do it tonight. During these proceedings, a number of Conservative Members have expressed anxieties and doubts, for their concerns have not been met. As they know that it will be irrevocable, they must not go into the Division Lobby in support of the provision. There are far too many doubts and far too many anxieties.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No, I must continue my speech.

I have read again the Chancellor's reasoning before the Treasury Select Committee for the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and power. I should mention in passing that VAT is to be imposed on domestic fuel and power. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), perhaps by a slip of the tongue, implied repeatedly in her speech that VAT will be imposed on just gas and electricity, but that is not so. It will be imposed on gas, electricity, oil, logs, peat, ducted air—anything that we care to name.

Mr. Hoon: And coal.

Mr. Beith: Yes, coal as well.

People who live in rural areas have little choice about fuel. For example, they do not have the gas option. They have keen and strong feelings about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury pointed out to me earlier that that point was made on the doorstep in many villages. Many people in rural communities are worried about the effect on oil prices, for they do not have the same choice of fuel as others do.

When the Chancellor gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee, he said:

> "I could have extended VAT to other items and, indeed, I am strongly tempted to at times."

There we have it. We have a Chancellor who spends rarely a week without thinking of the possibility of extending VAT to other items. This man is dangerous. He is subject to many temptations and when he succumbs to them he has no regrets. That is why he is a walking invitation to people to vote Liberal Democrat. For the narrowest of party reasons, we should like to keep him, but for the broader reasons of national interest, the economy and this proposal we think that it is time he went.

The Chancellor is tempted to extend VAT not only to domestic fuel but to many other items as well. This tax does not make sense, it is not a well-directed tax, it is not an environmental tax, and the Committee should reject it tonight.

5.30 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Tonight, I shall vote with the Opposition. It will be only the second time in 10 years that I have been unable to support my party in the Lobby. The previous time was when the Tory party made a preposterous proposal to extend proportional representation to elections in Northern Ireland. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) in his place, because he and I joined the Ulster Unionists in opposing the appalling idea that proportional representation is a relevant means of deciding any election. That is how strongly I feel about this matter. In making this proposal, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made a serious error of judgment. Indeed, I would take it one step further: I feel ashamed that my party could make such a proposal. I know that my constituents would feel ashamed of me if I were to vote for it. That is how important the issue is.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who 20 years ago piloted through the House the original VAT law, has repeatedly told the House that the structure of VAT has stood the test of time. Under different Governments and five different Prime Ministers, the basic structure of VAT, as established about 20 years ago, has been accepted on both sides of the Chamber. This is the first substantial breach of those rules. Of course, there have been fringe extensions, which can be important in themselves, but this is not a fringe extension, because it extends VAT into a different area from any that the House contemplated. I shall be interested to see how my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing votes, because he has repeatedly commended to the House the basic structure that was laid down in 1972.

Opposition spokesmen referred to election promises that were made only a year ago. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made those statements, and when they were supported by other leaders of my party, I believed that they meant them. I made them to my constituents and when I did so I meant them, and I mean them today. I have no intention of saying to any of my constituents, "When I said that to you a year ago, it was only a conditional promise against the possibility that things might change."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer justifies this substantial change in policy on the ground that circumstances today are very different from what they were a year ago and that therefore we must approach the new circumstances in a different light. Of course the recession has been longer and deeper than my right hon. Friend thought at the time. However, if it were necessary for him to raise taxes—and he judged that it was—he could have chosen many other taxes to raise, rather than extend VAT and so raise tax in this way.

Circumstances have not changed so much that this extension to the law is essential. It is, I suppose, just possible to envisage certain circumstances—if the country

were involved in a world war, for example—in which one would be justified in saying to one's constituents that, as the situation was now totally different, fiscal policy must be approached on a different basis than that which had hitherto been assumed. Although the Government's requirement for tax may be greater than was supposed a year ago, I cannot accept that there were not other ways that they could have chosen of raising similar or greater sums of tax.

Frankly, my position and my criticism of the Government is that I cannot accept the fiscal and economic argument that they have advanced to justify the tax. If taxes had to be raised, there were other taxes that could have been chosen. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary that the tax that is under-performing at the moment—and the take from which needs to be substantially increased—is income tax. Getting more people back to work and having an economy that is running more effectively than ours has been in the recent past would result in a greater income tax yield than at present.

Environmental arguments have been advanced by Treasury Ministers and have been challenged and denied by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I agree with both of them that, if the case is to be advanced on environmental grounds, the people who will be least able to afford the environmental improvements that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is trying to achieve by the imposition of the tax are those whose incomes will be most adversely affected by its imposition. Those people, whether they are recipients of the social security system or are just beyond its thresholds, will have the least spare cash to buy the double glazing or whatever is required to achieve the necessary environmental improvements.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I declare an interest as the chairman of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) did not include historic buildings and heritage in his list of those who will be punished by this proposal, but there will be costs for the Government and the heritage of Scotland. The difficulties that we have in trying to stretch a strawberry a mile to try to maintain the heritage of Scotland will be increased.

Mr. Powell: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that information, of which I was otherwise unaware.

I challenge the extension of VAT on social and political grounds. The people who will find the imposition of the tax to be the greatest burden are those who least deserve to be punished by this Parliament and, above all else, will be those who stand just above the threshold for social security and income support. I have no doubt that, in an odd, funny sort of way, the social security system will provide some compensation—not, of course, total compensation—for the extra costs that will be incurred.

People outside the social security system who have saved throughout their lives, as my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said, will incur an extra penalty because they have saved. Every hon. Member knows that the most angry of our constituents are always those whose incomes are just above the threshold, but I should like to add a further point of considerable significance: those people have seen their incomes from savings come right down in the past few months.

Lower interest rates are bad for savers. Those savers now draw substantially less investment income because the Government have pursued policies that have enabled them to bring interest rates closer to, but not quite reaching, realistic levels. As well as suffering from that fall in investment income, those people will be further penalised when the VAT charge on fuel is imposed next year and levied at double the rate in 1995. I have to speak up for those thousands and thousands of my constituents who are just above the threshold levels.

Mr. Marlow: Would my hon. Friend's constituents react in the same way as my constituents would—I expect that they would because they are not far removed—to the point made by our right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury? He is a brilliant and excellent Minister, but he was wholly beneath himself when he said that people on pensions or income support would receive an extra £1·60 a week each because pensions were rising higher than the retail prices index. He knows that their cost of living is not related to the RPI at all, as they do not have mortgages. In fact, their savings will have gone down; instead of being better off by £1·60 a week, they will be worse off. Insult has been added to injury by his remarks today.

Mr. Powell: I am not prepared to go quite as far as my hon. Friend in his style of criticising our right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. However, I must confess that I was somewhat puzzled to hear my right hon. Friend phrase his argument in the way he did. Although it will not be enough to change my mind, I very much hope that our right hon. Friends in the Treasury will think far more deeply about the impact of the policy on those who could claim social security but do not and on those who are just above the threshold. Both those groups will have to bear the full impact, which will have a serious effect on their standard of living. It is a social policy that I am not prepared to support and that is why I cannot go along with my right hon. and hon. Friends this evening.

Mr. Dicks: I apologise for not being present for the start of my hon. Friend's speech. I want to ask for his view on two issues. First, if economic growth is faster than the Government expect, there may be an opportunity to have a rethink before the proposal's full impact is felt. Secondly, most hon. Members would have been prepared to pay more tax to ensure that pensions were at a far more realistic level than at present and to cover this situation.

Mr. Powell: I hope that economic growth is much faster that the Government currently predict, because I fear for the consequences otherwise. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East was correct to say that once VAT was imposed, it would not be possible to think again about it. Once it is imposed, it will remain imposed. That is one of the inevitable facts of life which go with the VAT regime under the directive to which the Government are a signatory.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Powell: I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to make some more progress. On second thoughts, I give way.

Mr. Nicholls: I have tempted my hon. Friend. I shall have to ensure that that temptation comes up to the mark. I do not intend to get involved in the debate about whether one can go back on VAT rates once they have been increased——

Sir Teddy Taylor: One cannot.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend always says that on these occasions.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) agree that, during the next year, there may be at least the opportunity for the Government to work out proper compensation mechanisms to ensure that those whom he identifies as being just above the income support level can be helped in some way? To that extent, matters may not be quite as hopeless as my hon. Friend understandably points out.

Mr. Powell: I hope that my hon. Friend is right, but I fear that he is not. I fear that our present structure of social security would make it virtually impossible for the Government to be able to identify compensation for individual amounts, such as VAT on fuel and power. If they attempted to do so, they would be caught up in an administrative nightmare.

There is a better way in which to deal with the problem which my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge has outlined and which I wish that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary would be prepared to concede. The best way is to withdraw the clause altogether so that we do not face the difficulties that are implicit in it. The best thing to do would be to withdraw it and to think again. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor still believed that he must raise taxes by £2·3 billion, he could then come forward with alternative tax-increasing proposals which did not involve that nightmare.

5.45 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor: If my hon. Friend's suggestion is not possible, could we not solve everyone's difficulties by pursuing the policy of having a British-built aeroplane flying above my hon. Friend's constituency and dropping £10 notes? That would deal with all the problems raised by my hon. Friend and would solve all the political problems. If our hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) does not want the money that way, how does he think that he will get it?

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend is a most beguiling advocate. In the past, he has offered cash sums to the many farmers in Northamptonshire and he is now offering £10 notes. I assure him that if he came to eastern Northamptonshire, he would find himself a very popular man.

I shall now draw together the political and social strands of the argument. All our constituencies are different. I represent few people who are wealthy and not many people who could be described as affluent. Many people who vote for me are far less well off than many of those who vote for my opponents. I do not want to betray the trust that they have shown in me over a decade and in three elections. To be candid, few people expected me to win any of the three elections, so I have a particular obligation to those who have supported me. Those on modest incomes who have saved and those who find life a real struggle expect and deserve more of me than to support the clause.

While people are drawing political conclusions, I shall spell out something that needs to be spelt out loudly and clearly by Conservative Members this evening. Those of us who were involved in last week's elections for the county councils know perfectly well that it was virtually impossible to get Conservative voters to go to the polls. Turnouts were extraordinarily low. People who would not dream of ever voting for the Labour party or for the Liberal Democrats registered their protest by staying at home.

There are always many issues, but one issue had to be top of the list. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said had been discovered in the Newbury by-election, Conservative voters in Northamptonshire said again and again, "We are completely opposed to the imposition of VAT on fuel and power." That is why I say that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made a considerable error of judgment in introducing the proposal in the Budget.

I have tabled amendment No. 36, on village halls, which has been selected for debate in the group of amendments relating to VAT and charities. I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) raise the subject. For several years, especially in Committees considering the Finance Bill, I have raised the question of village halls. I have been rather proud and rather pleased to try to do what I can to ensure that the village hall movement and those who work voluntarily so hard for and in village halls receive the just attention of the House.

Some years ago, accompanied by a team from the Village Halls Forum, I visited my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who was then Minister of State, Treasury. We were concerned about VAT as it affects village halls. I had received letters from all over the country and had the enthusiastic support of a great many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. We were discussing fuel in particular. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, we are talking not just about gas and electricity but about oil. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary may be right to say that gas and electricity prices are falling at present but oil prices are not.

My right hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Treasury told us that one way of mitigating the potential disaster facing village halls as a result of the imposition of VAT was for them to have oil tanks of less than 500 gallons capacity—because at the time, one only paid VAT above 500 gallons. Many would argue that that was an arbitrary cut-off point; indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary argued that himself. I am prepared to concede that there are illogicalities in the British tax system, and so there should be. The fact that something is illogical does not mean that it lacks common sense or public support. Village hall representatives were given to understand that, if they had fuel tanks of less than 500 gallons, they would be able to avoid the imposition of VAT. Now that advice has turned sour on them.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends represent rural areas with a robust village hall movement. I do, and I am proud of the developments that have been taking place throughout my constituency—the new village halls that have been appearing, and so on. I am conscious, however, of the fact that the Government have made life more difficult for the village halls in a number of ways. The food

regulations have imposed an enormous extra burden on the movement. The uniform business rate has imposed a staggering extra burden on many village halls. The 17·5 per cent. VAT rate in itself imposes a substantial burden, which the village halls have found it difficult, if not impossible, to meet. The extension of VAT to fuel and power represents one more blow. I am against it and shall oppose it. I owe my constituents more than to support the clause and I shall, with enthusiasm, vote against it.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): In his Budget statement on 16 March, the Chancellor disguised his decision to impose VAT on domestic fuel as a measure intended to encourage the efficient use of energy. He told the House that the measure would encourage greater energy efficiency in every household in the country. That strikes me as one of the more fantastic claims that the Chancellor has made, belonging with classic statements such as that about the green shoots of recovery. At least the Chancellor was more honest—and to some extent, the Chief Secretary was more honest today—when he went on to explain that the measure was also intended to raise a considerable amount of revenue for the Exchequer.

The green claims that have been made for a tax on domestic fuel are flawed. If this is a green tax, the House should be told how the Government will judge its success in improving energy efficiency. Will it be according to the amount of fuel saved and not used or according to a decrease in pollution? The Chief Secretary told us today that he believed that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel would save about 1·5 million tonnes of carbon emissions by the end of the decade, which would go some way towards the estimated 10 million tonne saving that will have to be made on the basis of what was agreed at the Rio convention.

At this stage, that estimate is only an estimate. The figure could be much higher, although some estimate that it could be much lower. If that was the case for the defence in respect of the decision to place VAT on domestic fuel, it should have been spelt out more fully.

The Energy Savings Trust—a body that has literally just been put together—is supposed to be saving some 2·5 million tonnes of carbon emissions by the end of the decade. No one can see at this stage how that can be achieved; I wait with interest to see how it will be done. A note from the Treasury to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee in April estimated that the imposition of VAT of 17·5 per cent. on domestic fuel and power would reduce domestic energy consumption by 3·5 per cent. by the end of the decade. A price elasticity of 0·2 per cent. was used. But as the domestic sector accounts for around one quarter of energy consumption, overall use would fall by just over 1 per cent. That means that the extension of VAT will fall far short of its stated aim of reducing domestic fuel consumption.

The Chancellor will have seen the letter sent to him on 30 March by 90 voluntary organisations representing a variety of consumer interests, in which grave concern was expressed about the decision. The letter said:

> "Your proposal to compensate low income householders will bring little comfort to the seven million who live in cold, damp homes which they cannot afford to heat now, because of inadequate heating systems and poor thermal efficiency. Low income householders are beyond the reach of market forces"—

that is presumably what the imposition of VAT is about—

> "and cannot respond to your price signal except by turning off their heating and going without."

That statement is backed up by everyone working in the field of energy in homes. People on low incomes cannot respond to market forces. Before there was any thought of imposing VAT on domestic fuel, there should have been a proper public debate. The Government should have given figures showing how they believed people on low incomes would respond.

Opposition Members, and no doubt one or two Conservative Members, want to know what the Government propose to do to extend the scope of the home energy efficiency scheme, which is at present limited to loft insulation and draught-proofing and in respect of which payment can be claimed only by people on income support.

Millions of people who are not on income support live in homes that are badly in need of energy efficiency measures. Nothing has been said about what will happen in that connection. Will Ministers hand over some of the £950 million that they will raise next year, the £2·3 billion that they will raise the following year and the £3 billion that they will raise the year after that as a result of the VAT measure, and increase the funding of the home energy efficiency scheme so that people in poorly insulated homes can benefit?

In 1991, the Department of Energy stated:

> "The Government starts from the position that consumers do not need subsidy, regulation or financial incentives or penalty (through the taxation system) to get them to act to improve their energy efficiency."

What has changed? Why must we now have VAT on domestic fuel? What evidence was produced to get the Government to change their mind? What has happened since 1991?

The policy does not appear in the Government's discussion paper "Climate Change", published only last December. I believe that the reason why the policy does not appear in that paper is that it has nothing to do with reducing emissions of pollutants.

All the evidence that we have received suggests that people will use less fuel so that their bills do not increase and that people on low incomes will go without adequate heating. Let me quote from the findings of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which, for many years, has done great work in social policy matters. In its "Social Policy Research Findings No. 25", published in January 1992, the foundation said that fear of debt, and the certainty that "doing without" saves money, means that low-income households limit their use of electricity by heating their homes inadequately rather than reducing their energy demand by efficiency measures.

There is no evidence that increasing the amount that people will have to pay will send them out to improve the insulation of their homes. If the Government thought that there was an anomaly because energy efficiency improvements incurred VAT whereas fuel did not, they should have taken VAT off energy efficiency improvements so that people could make their homes more energy-efficient. Instead, the Government have imposed VAT on the fuel that people will use and on standing charges.

The measure has nothing to do with the environment. It is clearly nothing more than a tax-raising measure. It is typical of the Conservative Government. It will hurt the unemployed and low-paid more than anyone else. The Government have tried to defend the measure by saying that it is an environmental measure. They have missed.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

They tried to say that it was a fiscal measure to increase the money which goes into the Treasury because public finances are in a bad state. They have missed on that too.

6 pm

It must be the case that people who depend entirely or partly on state benefits will receive an average increase at some stage. Some people within that category will be losers and others will be gainers, because people have different ways of heating their homes. There must be losers and winners. If we do not defeat the measure and it is passed, I hope that regional averages will be established, so that people who live in colder climates in the United Kingdom receive more compensation than others. But even if with regional averages, there would be losers and winners.

People will lose because the Government's policy is misplaced. It is misplaced in both environmental and fiscal terms. We should reject it tonight to save face for everyone, including the Ministers who are promoting the measure.

Mr. Milligan: This is an unpopular measure. I know from talking to people in my constituency in the county elections that there is a great deal of resentment about it. It is easy for Opposition politicians to cash in on that resentment. To increase taxation and please is not given to many politicians. However, in government we have a duty to do not merely that which is popular but that which is right. We also have a duty to tell the truth.

The truth is that the public sector borrowing requirement is equivalent to £1,000 for every man, woman and child in Britain. The Opposition say that they would not have allowed the PSBR to rise so high. If they had followed that policy, unemployment would have been even higher. It was right to increase the PSBR to deal with the exceptional problem of the recession.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) sometimes seems to confuse cause and effect. She said that one of the ways in which she would cut the PSBR was by cutting unemployment. I am surprised that, when she was spokesman on health, she did not suggest that she would reduce the common cold by reducing sneezing. If we are to reduce unemployment, we must have a recovery. That in turn will reduce the PSBR. She seems to have got those issues the wrong way round.

The hon. Member for Peckham accused the Government of hypocrisy. But what could be more hypocritical than to tell people that there is no need to increase taxation, and to refuse to answer questions on what a future Labour Government would do? Every time that the hon. Lady was challenged on that matter, she refused to give an answer.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Did the hon. Gentleman give that advice to the Prime Minister before his statement on 27 March last year, just 13 days before the election, when he gave the most unequivocal statement that there would be no extension of the scope of VAT? The hon. Gentleman talks about the need to be honest. Where on earth are we, and what on earth is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Milligan: I would be flattered if the Prime Minister listened to my views, especially as I was not a Member of Parliament at that time. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. At that stage, there were no plans to extend the scope of VAT. But Governments have to react to events. The recession was far longer than we expected. We made additional pledges at Rio, which the Opposition strongly supported. But they do not expect us ever to have to pay the bill for the pledges that were made.

So we have a completely dishonest Labour Front-Bench team, who give the impression that there is some easy way out of the problem, and that taxation does not have to be increased. The Opposition have never answered questions about what they would do in government or whether they would repeal the measure.

Mr. Barron: Does the hon. Gentleman think it right that, in the past five years, the top 5 per cent. of British income tax payers have received cash discounts from the Government running into billions of pounds, yet we ask people, many on low income or benefit, to pay VAT on standing charges and domestic fuel?

Mr. Milligan: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised that point. I rang the Institute for Fiscal Studies this morning—I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is an independent body—and asked for its estimate of the overall effect on income distribution of the set of measures that were announced in the Budget. It said that, provided that means-tested benefits were increased in the way that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has made it clear they will be, the effect was "broadly proportional". It is not a regressive set of measures.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Mr. Milligan: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's question.

If one takes it in isolation, the imposition of VAT on fuel is regressive, but one must look at the balance of measures that were announced.

When we have a PSBR worth £1,000 for every man, woman and child, everyone in the country has to make a contribution to putting it right. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) said that it was unfair that the charge would fall on people with modest incomes. I agree with him, but the problem is that most people in Britain are on modest incomes. If we are to balance the books, everyone has to make a contribution. It is important that those measures are seen to be fair, and are fairly distributed. The balance of measures announced in the Budget is fair.

The Liberal Democrats have a different approach from the Labour party. They accept that there should be taxation on energy. They support a carbon tax, but they have an original approach. They would compensate everyone for the extra taxation. That would do nothing about the PSBR and nothing to discourage excessive energy use. That is the second purpose of the measure. It is intended to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The economic knowledge of the hon. Member for Peckham appeared to be rather limited. She appeared to have even less scientific knowledge when she suggested that the measure was intended to deal with the hole in the ozone layer. It has nothing to do with the hole in the ozone layer. It is to reduce global warming. At Rio, we gave a promise to reduce carbon output by the equivalent of 10 million tonnes to deal with global warming.

The Opposition and the Liberal party are enthusiastic about environmental measures, but as soon as it comes to paying the bill for them, they say that no bills should be imposed and no one should have to pay extra. We need to reduce excessive energy consumption. The House of Commons, in which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has some role, might set a lead by reducing its excessive central heating. If we are to reduce excessive fuel consumption, we must take action.

It is significant that the hon. Member for Peckham, who was wearing a fetching green outfit, paid little attention to the green aspects of the measure. I wish to quote what Friends of the Earth, which is widely accepted as an independent environmental group, has had to say about the measures which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced. It issued a press release entitled "Budget Briefing . . . Why Friends of the Earth welcomes the Chancellor's energy price hikes." It says:

"Friends of the Earth therefore welcomes the Chancellor's commitment to increasing domestic fuel and power prices over the next two years through the gradual imposition of VAT."

So this is a difficult and unpopular measure, but I believe that it is a correct one.

I welcome the newly elected hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) to the House. I know that he had a good education at a good Oxford college, but he seems to have gone politically astray since then. I hope that he enjoys his brief stay in the House. But those who win by-elections should remember that those who win general elections are those who have the honesty to tell the truth to the electorate, to do what is right and not to seek short-term popularity. For that reason I shall support the Government tonight.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Despite the comments of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan), one thing has become clear over time. It was even acknowledged by the Chief Secretary in his speech today. This is not a green measure and it was never intended as such. It is a revenue-raising measure. Another thing which is clear and which the Government have tried to disguise is that, of all the promises that were broken in what was probably the most dishonest election campaign in recent times, the broken promise on VAT on fuel was the most appalling breach of faith.

On 27 March, 13 days before the election, the Prime Minister gave an unequivocal promise to the nation that he had no intention or need to raise the level or scope of VAT. In his Budget Speech, the Chancellor gave the same commitment. Remember, we are not talking about a small measure. This is not an additional small sum added on the side to balance the books. It is the Government's biggest single revenue-raising proposal this year. It represents the biggest detraction from every commitment that the Conservatives gave before the last election. About £2·3 billion will be raised by the extension of VAT to domestic fuel. It is a scandal.

The need to extend VAT to domestic fuel did not creep up on the Government. After all, the Conservatives have been in charge of the nation's monetary policy for nearly 14 years. Before the general election, they announced what they alleged were the Labour party's proposals and told the people what their tax proposals were. They deliberately lied and deceived people about that.

Mr. Dicks: Without wishing to defend the amendment, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government had to change course because of changed circumstances. The leader of the Labour party, when asked recently why he was opposed to tax increases and was in favour of tax reductions, replied that circumstances had changed in the last year. If it is good enough for that right hon. and learned Gentleman to change his mind because of changed circumstances, why is not it good enough for the Government?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not believe that circumstances have changed to such a degree that the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel is warranted. In any event, if circumstances have changed, the Government have been responsible for those changes. They decided to push the pound into the ERM and they then spectacularly withdrew it in September.

As the Conservatives had complete control of the economy in the last year, they should have known—I believe that they did know—about the impending imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. As I say, they deliberately lied about it and pushed it to the other side of the election campaign. The result is that, in the most cynical way, they are retreating from the clear commitments that they gave before the election.

Not only is the VAT imposition massive, but, as hon. Members have pointed out, it will be permanent. The Chief Secretary said that perhaps we would learn by experience. That cannot happen with the VAT proposal. Under EC regulations, once we have given up the right to zero-rate fuel, it will be given up for ever. Once approved, that will be the end of it, which is why I welcome the commitment of some Conservative Members to vote against the VAT proposal.

It has been suggested that the VAT imposition is not regressive. In fact, it is among the most regressive of taxes being introduced this year. Figures show that the poorest decile of the population spend 13 per cent. of their income on fuel. The imposition of VAT will result in an extra 3 per cent. of their disposable income being removed from them. That will come on top of the problems they face as a result of our present appallingly regressive tax system.

In the 14 years during which the Conservatives have been in office, the tax burden on the poor has increased from 40 per cent. to—including the measures in this Finance Bill—50 per cent. In other words, the poorest people in Britain will be paying 50 per cent. of their income in taxes in one form or another.

Government policy to move the tax burden from direct to indirect taxation is designed to hide the sort of sins that they are committing in the Finance Bill. Who on earth would accept an income tax regime that meant the poorest paying more than the richest? Such a policy would be clearly unfair and unacceptable. Yet the present basket of taxation proposed by the Government will mean the poor paying massively more than the rich. The top decile in the nation pay a third of their income in tax while the poorest pay half. That represents an appalling state of affairs.

6.15 pm

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend will agree that it is not surprising that many members of the public are beginning to compare the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel with the poll tax. In this case, the poorest will be hit the hardest, as happened with the poll tax. No wonder the public are

[Mr. Winnick]

linking the two in their minds. I hope that the Tory party will deeply regret, in electoral terms, what they are doing in punishing those who are in the greatest need of help.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, although the analogy is even closer. The Chief Secretary said, in justifying the change, that people would be able to cope with the increases because of changes in the rebate system with the introduction of the council tax regime. Under the poll tax regime, the lowest earners had to pay at least 20 per cent. A great deal of fighting took place before the Government finally accepted that 100 per cent. allowances were necessary under the council tax system. The Chief Secretary is discounting that in the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel.

I was astonished to hear the right hon. Gentleman say, in attempting to justify the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel and the offsetting arrangements, "The measures that we have taken are so numerous and large that I do not think that hon. Members appreciate everything that we have done for these people." I assure him that among "these people" he claims to be helping, the pensioners and those living on income support will not appreciate his efforts. I do not know what sort of world the right hon. Gentleman is living in. It is not the same world as that inhabited by my constituents.

In endeavouring to secure better offset arrangements from the Government, some Conservative Members have asked for the social security system to be carefully examined. I remind them that the review of Departments, including the DSS, announced by the Treasury some months ago, was not designed to extend aid to cover the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. That review is designed to save millions of pounds to help close the massive gap in our public finances. Anybody who believes that the Conservatives are sincere in wishing to offset the effects of the new charge through the social security system are deluding themselves.

The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) talked about the anger that the people who had voted for him felt about the imposition of VAT and how he could not possibly support it as a result. My constituents do not feel similar anger because, unlike that hon. Member's constituents, few of them voted for the Government. My constituents knew, when the election result came in, the sort of thing that would happen. They were not stupid about it and therefore they are not angry because they knew jolly well what was going to happen.

Their anger is directed at the people who were stupid enough to vote the Conservative party into power for a fourth term. The anger will be felt by the people who feel betrayed, by the people who were conned, by the people who believed what they were told by the Tory party before the election. The anger felt by the people who did not vote for the Conservatives is directed towards those who did.

Mr. Marlow: As a result of ERM membership and being in the ERM much longer than we should have been, which imposed economic policies on the United Kingdom that may or may not have been appropriate for the German Federal Republic, this country has found itself, having already had a recession, in a much worse recession, which has gone on much longer than it should have done and caused much more damage to many of our constituents' hopes and aspirations and also a great deal of damage to the Government's finances than it should have done. As supporters of the Government, we all understand the predicament in which they find themselves.

When we came out of the ERM on white Wednesday, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was caught singing in the bath. Apparently, that is a drowning offence. If I can use another metaphor, when the scrum is being pushed backwards at ever-increasing speed, one does not sack the hooker but one looks to the leader of the pack to redouble his efforts. When we look at the measures before us today, and when we look at what happened to the Government in the local elections and at Newbury last week, we must be frank, direct and straightforward with the people. When we look at this particular matter, we have to be a little more honest than we have so far been.

I support VAT on domestic fuel and power, because, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor put it to the House in his Budget speech on 16 March, it was done

"in order to meet the commitment that we entered into at Rio."

That was a proper commitment to enter into and it is quite proper that we should seek to meet it. We need the right incentives to encourage people to consume less energy and conserve more energy. That is what VAT on domestic fuel and power will do, right and proper.

My right hon. Friend also said:

"Against this background, I have one further measure to propose that will not only encourage greater energy efficiency in every household . . . but will also raise money for the Exchequer."

We need to raise money for the Exchequer—I agree with that—and that is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor wished to introduce VAT on fuel and power. That decision is green, it is good, it is correct, it is right, but, "It's not what you do, but how you do it".

We must take two problems into account——

Mr. Beith: Yes, Lamont and Major. [*Laughter.*]

Mr. Marlow: In a very good speech, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury addressed those problems, but he did not go far enough. Some silly points have been made during the debate, including those made, if I may say so, by some of my hon. Friends who quoted from 1976. There will be people voting in the next general election who were not even conceived in 1976. Let us get on with today's agenda and not concentrate on some of the silly things that happened years ago.

Before the Opposition are too agreeable to my speech, I must draw attention to the fact that, time and time again, they refer to the fact that the Government make promises and break promises, and so on and so forth. All the time the Opposition say to Ministers, "Deny you are going to do that; say you won't do that with VAT; Say you won't do this or that." Every time the stock answer comes now, as it came 10, 20, 30 and 40 years ago, "We have no plans to do anything about it." That is what the Government said at the general election and at that time it was right, honest and correct to say that.

But circumstances have changed. If the Opposition, heaven forfend, become the Government of this country, circumstances will change when they are in power, and they will say, "We have no plans." That is the stock way of doing it, the proper way of doing it, it is the way that it will continue to be done in the future. Let us not deceive

the people by saying that the Government were deceiving the electorate at the election, because they were not. What they said then was a perfectly proper thing to say. Let us have that on record and let us have it correct.

When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the imposition of VAT on fuel, he said:

"Social security benefits, will, of course, rise . . . but I recognise that this will cause particular problems for those on low incomes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will take this into account when the income-related benefits are uprated next year."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 183.]

It is right that we should look after the poorer people.

We should discourage people from using too much energy and encourage them to become energy-efficient. Such energy efficiency measures should also apply to those who are less well off, but we must take into account that they will be subject to an increased financial commitment. I understand that we will offer help to those on income support—in some cases, those who are the most unfortunate and, in others, those who have least helped themselves. We will look after them.

After the election, I made a short speech in which I expressed my concern for those pensioners with a little bit of savings, who are just above the income support level. Every time the Government introduce a new tax, which they must do and which I support, those on income support are looked after, but those who have looked after themselves are ignored. Time and time again, that group of people who have saved, strived, who fought in the war and who have done their best for the country, their families and themselves are ignored and put on one side. This VAT increase is one time too many. What Ministers have said so far about their plight has not met that problem.

Those pensioners are forgotten every time, but their time has now come. The Conservative Government must not cast them on one side. They must take into account the commitment of those people and what they have done for the country. We must support them. All right, the Government can raise the tax, but they must remember those who have marginal savings and marginal additional pensions, which place them just above the level eligible for income support. This time we must consider them when we introduce compensation later in the year.

I agree that we should tax consumption and encourage people to be effective and efficient in their use of energy. We should encourage people to look after their houses so that they do not waste energy. It is a good thing to make everyone conscious of the fact that the Government are green and that we have green policies. But why are we imposing VAT on the standing charge? That charge, which covers the cost of getting gas or electricity to the ironmongery in the street, is for providing an essential service. It is not to do with use, but with providing a facility.

Just as we provide water without taxation, food without taxation and sewage disposal without taxation, we should not tax the standing charge,—although we will not raise as much money in taxation. I and many Conservative Members want the Government to look after the people who have saved and looked after themselves. We do not want the Government to ignore them. The Government should not tax the standing charge, as it is an essential service.

6.30 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Vanquished Tory candidates in last Thursday's elections said:

"We've been crucified by our own Government".

The Prime Minister said last Friday—as we saw on our television screens—that the electorate had given him a "bloody nose". But even some of his party's surviving representatives have continued to throw punches at him since then.

Speaking to the *Sunday Times* last Saturday, an Essex Tory councillor said:

"We went into the General Election telling people not to vote Labour because they would put up taxes, and what happens? The Government put up VAT. We need a leadership that does what it says it will do and we need it badly."

No close observer of last Thursday's shire elections and the Newbury by-election on the same day is in any doubt that the Government's decision to impose VAT on domestic fuel was a hugely important factor in the massive loss of Tory seats.

The morning after the party's humiliating rejection by the electorate, the Prime Minister said that the lessons of the disaster would be quickly learned. The truth of that will be tested at the conclusion of today's debate. If the Government persist in the clear breach of their undertaking at the general election, they will demonstrably not have learnt even the first lesson of the rout inflicted on them last Thursday.

The imposition of VAT on gas and electricity bills is bitterly resented by people who feel cheated by the blatant falsehood that they were told at the general election. Every household will have to pay more but, as all of us know, the elderly poor will be hit much harder than others. If they are not compensated in full—which the Government still refuse to concede—their plight will be of even greater concern to everyone who knows the facts about deprivation among the elderly poor in Britain today.

Only one quarter of pensioners pay income tax, but every pensioner pays VAT. That is why the poorest pensioners dread the extension of the tax to gas and electricity. Few people knew on Budget day that VAT on thier domestic fuel bills would apply, not only to the gas and electricity they use, but to the standing charges imposed on them by the privatised companies. The poorest pensioners pay more in standing charges than they do for the gas and electricity they use. For them now to have to pay a further 8 per cent., and then 17·5 per cent., in standing charges, is a scandal that I hope the Committee will refuse to sanction tonight.

The Government have attempted no justification of the imposition of VAT on standing charges. There is no way in which such a levy has any environmental justification. It is unrelated to actual consumption and is a gratuitous extra cost imposed on the consumer. The only way she or he can avoid VAT on standing charge is not to use gas or electricity at all, yet, in a recent parliamentary reply, the Paymaster General—who has now joined us—told me that, within two years, the Treasury expected to raise £100 million from pensioners in VAT on standing charges alone. That is surely intolerable from every viewpoint. Will the Chancellor at least accept today that VAT must not be levied on the standing charges to which pensioners are subjected?

The anxieties of pensioners about VAT on fuel bills are shared by severely disabled people, who have to spend

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

more than most people on heating their homes. They need to do so for health reasons. We must strive to protect them, too, from the effects of the Government's broken promise. In their case, VAT on domestic fuel is a straight tax on disability. Not only disabled people themselves, but many doctors, have told me of the dangers their patients will face if they are forced to economise on heating.

If the Chancellor is hellbent on persisting with his proposals, we should be told in the debate exactly how and to what extent the Government intend to compensate the elderly poor and severely disabled people for its effects. To leave them waiting and worrying until the autumn is widely condemned as studiedly cruel by their organisations. The Disability Alliance, which speaks for more than 200 organisations of and for disabled people, says:

"We fear that the imposition of VAT on fuel and Standing Charges will have a devastating effect on disabled people. If the proposal goes ahead, we urge you to press for an adequate period of consultation with organisations and groups representing low-income households to ensure that proper compensation is made."

Such consultation should have taken place before the Chancellor made his decision to extend VAT to fuel bills. He should also have discussed the issue in advance of any decision with the Charities Tax Reform Group. The cost to its member organisations if we fail to defeat the proposal will be £25 million a year, within two years, which will add significantly to the already large irrecoverable VAT burden borne by charities.

All that money was given by the public, not for the Billy Bunters of the Treasury, but to help children in need, cancer patients, ex-service men and women and their dependants, for whom the Royal British Legion works so hard, severely disabled people, the frail elderly and others. If the Government refuse to change their mind, it will mean that such groups and other needful people will soon lose another £25 million to the Chancellor, which will add anger to the anguish of those striving to help them at a time of Treasury-driven cuts in the provision of services by the public sector.

In a powerful letter in *The Times* today, Ian Bruce, the director general of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and others said:

"The real and agonising choice for charities will be in deciding which projects they will be unable to fund, which improvements they will need to delay, which deserving cases they will be unable to help. Charities are constantly improving their fund-raising efforts but—as with the environment—resources are not infinite. We cannot believe that this is what the government intended when it decided to impose VAT on fuel and power."

The letter was also signed by senior representatives of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Mencap, the Wellcombe Trust, Help the Aged and the National Children's Home.

They will know, as many hon. Members on both sides of the House know, that the effect of the Government's proposal could be to drive some charities out of existence. The signatories of the letter to *The Times* will have been encouraged by the highly principled speech made earlier in the debate by the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). Let us hope that other Conservative Members will join him in assisting us to defeat this perverse proposal in the Division Lobby tonight.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall first deal with the issue raised by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and also alluded to, in a whisper, by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)—the accusation that the Government have broken their promise by introducing VAT now. I accept at once that that issue does not go to the heart of the argument, but it is worth stating.

The allegation that the Government have broken their promise because they must have had plans at the time of the general election is inconceivable. The idea that the Government could ensure that such plans were not leaked within a week of their conception is nonsense. It is perfectly obvious that, had any such plans been afoot, there is no way that they could have remained hidden from the light of day for an entire year. We can be absolutely certain that there were no such plans, because the Government have given their word and because of the sheer practicalities.

Interestingly, and perhaps even engagingly, there has been some banter across the Chamber about election addresses. We have been asked what was in our election addresses, and we have made some inquiries about matters which were not in past Labour election addresses, and not a great deal of light was shed.

In my own election address, and in every election speech I have made in the three elections in which I have stood for Parliament, I have always made the point that the overriding responsibility of any Conservative Government is to run a proper fiscal policy. That entails ensuring that, when the state taxes and spends money, the gap between what is raised and what is spent, which has to be financed by borrowing, does not become so great that it represents a burden that the country cannot afford.

In those halcyon days not so long ago, we achieved a positive budget, in which the books balanced, and what a wonderful thing that was. We have done it before, and there is no reason why we should not do it again, but we cannot say simply that we will never increase taxes, any more than we can say that the correct rate of tax, be it the higher rate or the basic rate, should be 35 per cent. or 40 per cent. or whatever.

We have a responsibility to the country and the people in it to make sure that the gap never becomes unbridgeable. In good times, that can be achieved with lower tax rates; in bad times, we may have to increase tax rates, but the idea that we would serve the frail, the poor and the elderly by allowing the country's finances to get so far out of control that borrowing represented a burden that the country could not sustain is cruel and dangerous nonsense.

The mere fact that, at the last election, we said that we had no plans to increase tax yet we have now had to do so, is not a broken promise. It was adhering to a promise that, whatever else happens, we have to ensure that the gap between what we spend and what we raise never becomes thoroughly unbridgeable.

My second point was raised by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who, in anticipation of my kind remarks about him, has now returned to the Chamber. He said in his usual beguiling way that the Government should look at what happened in Newbury last Thursday and announce a complete change. He floated the idea that a Treasury Minister could or should walk in here and say, "We have not had a great deal of time to think about it, but guess what? Just because a temporary Member has been elected for Newbury, we had better change the whole thing." The right hon. Gentleman

put that in his usual beguiling way, but the trouble with the right hon. Gentleman, beguiling though he is, is that he always combines his suggestions with barefaced brazen cheek.

In any of their policy documents, manifestos or utterances, at any green Liberal conference where the brethren turn up drinking lentil soup and wearing kaftans and sandals—and the women are no better—at any of those conferences which the right hon. Gentleman has mounted over the years, the Liberals have been a thoroughly anti-energy party.

They have talked about tax increases on energy, yet when the Government, rightly or wrongly, decided, perhaps unwisely, to use one of those Liberal policies, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have said that they did not really mean it—it was a consultation document, just a manifesto document or another little joke. The idea that the right hon. Gentleman's views are worthy of any credence strikes me as complete nonsense.

6.45 pm

In an ideal world, it would be nice to respond to the messages that the electorate are giving us so directly by rewriting a Budget speech at this stage of the Finance Bill. It is a lovely idea, but it is completely unrealistic.

It is also the answer to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. [illegible]), which was one of the better speeches I have heard recently in the House. However one might feel about the anlysis, it was a speech of great sincerity. My hon. Friend took the view that, because it was a mistake to raise revenue by imposing a tax on energy, the Government should announce tonight that they would do it in some other way.

The trouble is that one cannot simply unpick a Budget package. I always find it interesting that millions of lobby organisations write to Members of Parliament before a Budget asking us to promise that, if a particular measure is introduced, such as VAT on children's clothing or anything else, if all else fails, we will vote against it. It is very rare that one can do that with a Budget measure.

A Budget is an overall setpiece: it stands or falls on whether it works as a package. The idea that Conservative Back Benchers, no matter how profoundly upset they are about the effect of the tax is having on a great many of their supporters, can tear it up and make progress in that way is not for a moment realistic.

Having said that, we need to face up to the effect which the measure has had on a great many of our supporters. I come from an area similar to that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), with a relatively large elderly population. Those people have served the country well and made a contribution in at least one world war, and sometimes two.

For the most part they have worked hard all their working lives. When they look at what they have amassed through that working life, they see a store of riches which is just above the income support level. In bad years, they feel that the product of their hard work, thrift and patriotism is that they have managed to exclude themselves from any of the free handouts that their less worthy and less thrifty neighbours receive.

In the 20th century, one cannot run a social security policy for the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. We cannot carry out a thrift audit on people, and say that, because they have not performed very well over the past 40 years, they had better starve. However, we have to address the effect on those who have been thrifty yet are just excluded from any help.

Those of us who are concerned about the effect of the measure on those people cannot pretend that we can unpick the Budget here and now, but we have to put down a marker and tell Ministers that the good intentions they have expressed in somewhat general terms to date about how they will help those people have to be built on.

The message from the west country in local government elections is that people are concerned about three things: Maastricht, water charges and VAT on energy. They are pre-eminently concerned about the last for one important reason. Imagine what it must be like in the twilight of one's years seeing one's income being cut, looking at the resources that one has saved and having to consider that the money may run out before one's life does. That is why people have been writing to us and telephoning us in the terms they have, and that is why they have been staying home in droves during the elections.

It was not meanness or their inability to say that Rio was a good idea and we should go along with it; it had nothing to do with that. It involved a word that politicians sometimes overuse—terror. It was people's terror that their money might run out, and we have to address that.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary appeared to take on board my point about protecting the neediest is not automatically the same as protecting those on income support. I have to tell him and my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General who is to reply to the debate that that is encouraging as a skeletal point, but it needs more flesh on its bones. We cannot simply say that those who are getting relief through the council tax have in a sense been compensated. That is not sufficient.

I accept that trying to identify the people who fall into the category that I described a few moments ago is no easy task, but I take a minimalist view of what a Back Bencher can do, and in the same way as I do not expect to be able to rewrite the Budget tonight, I do not expect to be able to provide the detail of the solution that my right hon. Friend will need. That is why he has such an impressive range of talent among his civil servants. Ultimately, once we have given them the political direction, it is up to them to come up with a formula that will deal with the problem.

There are ways in which this can be done. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned one approach—clawing back the money by way of income tax from the better-off pensioners. Incidentally, I am sorry that I was slightly acerbic to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor)—he seems to be receiving what I am saying now quite well——

Sir Teddy Taylor: Not at all.

Mr. Nicholls: I am pleased to have been able to bounce my hon. Friend around in the way he so richly deserves. He always manages to introduce a sour, partisan, partial European dimension to debates as important as this one. Be that as it may, if agreeing tonight to remove zero rating means that we cannot go back on that at some point in the future, I will be surprised——

Sir Teddy Taylor: Why?

Mr. Nicholls: Largely because my working rule is that it is always a good idea to consider the opposite of

[Mr. Nicholls]

whatever my hon. Friend says—that way, one comes close to common sense. But if, by some strange exception to that rule, what my hon. Friend says has a grain of accuracy, then perhaps we need to examine what rate of VAT is applicable.

Perhaps we should not go for 8 per cent. next year and 17·5 per cent. thereafter. Perhaps, if all the indicators are right and we are coming out of recession more quickly than we may have thought, and people will go back to work and generate tax revenue instead of using it up, the gap that needs to be bridged will be able to be bridged with a lower rate of VAT. Perhaps nothing more than 8 per cent. is needed. Moreover, the energy producers will be trying to reduce their costs to ensure that the savings that people make do not deprive them of revenue. This constitutes another approach.

If I have correctly identified the segment of the population that needs help, I have done my duty by my constituents. It is now up to Treasury Ministers to work out where we go from here. One way or another, they must deal with that point.

Sir Teddy Taylor: No doubt my hon. Friend's constituents will have noticed the amendment that calls for implementation of only the first stage of the VAT increase, and will watch his comments with interest. As my hon. Friend has said that the poor will not pay anyway, and as he wants better-off pensioners not to pay, who does he think should pay—bearing in mind the fact that the Government have explained that they desperately need the money?

Mr. Nicholls: I apologise. I thought that I had made that clear. My point was that protecting the neediest by concentrating help exclusively on those with income support does not meet the problem. I said also that many who will feel this most grievously are those just above the income support line.

It should not be beyond the resources of Government to identify that segment of the population and then concentrate help on them, too. There will obviously be hard cases. Some people will say that they are part of the working population and that they have no more means than the pensioners next door. Any form of targeted relief is by its very nature a blunt instrument; but those in the working population always have the possibility of work benefits and of a better job in the end—they have the possibility of hope. Many of the people to whom I have referred see no hope at all.

As a humble country lawyer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."]—all right, as a country lawyer, I do not pretend to have the expertise possessed by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East who claims that all we have to do is vote for one of the amendments. We can then go away saying that we have sorted out the problem. It is impossible to rewrite Budgets like that, but it is possible to respond to the fears, miseries and distresses of constituents. The Government have already acknowledged that income support in itself is not a sufficient mechanism; now they will have to do something about it.

Fortunately for the Government and for those, like me, who will support them in the Lobbies tonight, there is still time to get the mechanism right—but the work can start now.

Mrs. Ewing: The truth is that the only way to respond on behalf of our constituents is to ensure not only that the amendments are carried out but that the clause is defeated and does not stand part of the Bill. The Government never seem to have any difficulty introducing new measures when they choose to. If they are desperate for money, I am sure that they will easily find ways of implementing the alternative ideas.

It will not surprise the Committee to learn that I want to speak about the clause in the context of Scotland and in the context of my own record on the issue of fuel poverty and the deprivation suffered by many pensioners, people on low incomes and unemployed people.

As far back as the early 1970s, I started asking the Government questions about cold-related deaths in Scotland. At the time, it was not fashionable to ask such questions. It was generally reckoned that the only cold-associated deaths were those from hypothermia, usually due to accidents happening to people out walking or climbing. Since then, however, there has been a gradual recognition of the impact of cold on people's health and welfare.

My party has introduced no fewer than six Bills to try to implement an automatic cold-climate allowance for the winter months. So we have an honourable position in the argument for improvements for those who suffer from fuel poverty.

In the weeks and months before a Budget, we try to guess what the Chancellor, in purdah as he is, is up to. The great surprise this time was his imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. We did not anticipate that in our wildest dreams. Nor did many outside organisations. Most of the lobbying that we experienced was on behalf of organisations concerned about VAT on books, magazines, newspapers or children's clothes. I do not remember receiving any pre-Budget lobbying in connection with the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel.

We have all inevitably received since then many representations from organisations representing the elderly, the disabled and those on low incomes. We have also received many letters from constituents. My constituency is probably the most northerly of any represented in the Committee this evening, and I have had more letters on this subject than on any other in relation to the Budget.

There was a time earlier this afternoon, while I was repeatedly trying to intervene on the Chief Secretary, when I felt as if I must have had a bandage around my head: I seemed to be the invisible woman to him. He read out a great litany of what he believed were social security changes that had assisted people with fuel charges. He then told us to wait and see what the Government would produce, because it would only improve matters.

7 pm

I have a simple question for the Treasury: on what analysis do Ministers base their optimism that the imposition of VAT and the changes in the social security system will protect those most at risk from the changes? The campaign for cold credit allowances in Scotland analysed the 1987 changes to supplementary benefit, which the Chief Secretary claimed had helped these people.

He said that the funding had been directed to those most in need. However, as a result of these supplementary benefit changes and because the additional heating allowances were removed, it is estimated—these are figures

produced by the campaign for cold credit allowances—that between 1988 and 1991 there was an increase of 7·5 per cent. in excess winter deaths in Scotland.

I should like the Chief Secretary and his colleagues to go away and look at those statistics and tell me how they can justify the additional cost on standing charges and on fuel bills. The theory of targeting has not worked. The Government's theory of raising funds in this way will put life at risk. It is as simple and brutal as that, and the Chief Secretary must accept it.

I speak very much from a Scottish dimension. We are the only oil-exporting country in Europe. We have our own natural gas. We have resources of high calorific value coal. We have an established hydroelectric industry. We have the best wind and wave potential sites in Europe. Yet we have that increase in deaths in Scotland.

The Chief Secretary also referred to the comparison with Scandinavian countries. He was happy to draw the comparison on the taxation side, but he did not point out that in January, potentially the coldest month in the year, excess death rates go up in Germany by 4 per cent., in Scandinavia by 7 per cent., and in Scotland by 16 per cent. That is an appalling record. It is no wonder that pensioner organisations in Scotland are so angry that they are wondering whether the Government care about them at all.

I shared a platform organised by the Scottish Trades Union Congress in Glasgow some few weeks ago, where Marion Robertson, speaking on behalf of the Elderly Forum—a woman representing the thousands of pensioners who have contributed so much to our society and our present welfare system—said that she had been brought up to believe that the campaign for a welfare state really meant care from the cradle to the grave. She added that she believed that for this Government pensioners do not go to their graves fast enough.

If the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel goes ahead, there will be pensioners pushed to their graves faster than ever before, because of the climatic conditions that we suffer.

We hear that there are to be changes in the system. Let us look at some of the changes in the welfare system dealing with the issue of heating that have occurred over the past few years under this Government.

Severe weather payments were essentially forgotten about until it started to snow in London some two years ago. People got excited about them and the Prime Minister came in and contradicted every second day what his Minister for Social Security was saying in terms of triggering severe weather payments. Small adjustments were made as a result of that. It did not have to be below a certain temperature from Monday to Sunday; it could be any seven consecutive days. It was said that that would be a lot better.

Then the system of measurement was to be changed.

Mr. Winnick: Is the hon. Lady aware that, with regard to cold weather payments, the information that I received from the Library during March, when the cold weather was coming to an end, was that only one out of the 61 weather stations was triggered, so that the cold weather payments could be made? And, of course, as the hon. Lady will know, there were times in February when it was very cold indeed, but it did not reach freezing for the seven consecutive days before the trigger mechanism is used.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct, because there have to be these seven consecutive days, whereas for many people two consecutive days of severe cold can be enough to reduce their welfare to the point where they may have to be hospitalised.

The stations that are used often bear no relation to the geographical areas. For example, in Keith, in my constituency, during one of these periods, no one received a severe weather payment, but 10 miles along the road, in Huntly, cold weather payments were made, because it was based on a postal code system, and the postal code in my constituency was different from that of the Gordon constituency.

Since the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is here, he may be interested to know that in the Borders, for example, there seems to be an even more difficult position. In the eastern Borders, for instance, in 1991-92, more than 2,000 needy families were denied cold weather payments because they were connected to Boulmer weather station, location 60 miles south of the border. But sub-zero readings from the Eskdalemuir station, which is just along the road, allowed residents in the western Borders to receive payments on four occasions. The whole of Berwickshire district, Kelso and Earlston received no money, because temperatures at the Boulmer station did not trigger the mechanism.

The reality is that the severe weather payments system has no clout in dealing with the problem. Nor does it take account of the differences in climate. It takes 50 per cent. more to heat a house in Aberdeen, or in my constituency, than it does to heat a house in Bristol. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer were here, he might be interested to know that in his home islands of the Shetlands it takes 60 per cent. more.

We have a United Kingdom which may seem to be a small country, but, in terms of latitude is not. It is almost as far from Shetland to Southampton as it is from Southampton to Madrid, and no one would deny that there is a climatic difference between the latter two. One does not need to watch "Eldorado" to be aware of that difference in climate.

Our contention is that whatever changes are made by the Government in terms of social security, they must take account of the climatic differences within the country. That is what the Bills that we in the Scottish National party have introduced have been about. We have taken account of the various climatic changes, but we want this to be done in addition to severe weather payments. Such allowances should be paid automatically during the 17 weeks of the winter months, between December and March, so that those on low incomes, pensioners, those who are afraid to switch on the fire or turn on the gas, need not fear to do so, because they know that they will have that safety net provided automatically.

Before the Budget statement, a great deal of briefing went on behind the scenes on this issue. One of the insults that were added to the injury done to those in Scotland who are concerned with this issue was that apparently—this is recorded in the Scottish press—

"a Downing Street press officer, when questioned about the fuel rises, jokingly asked if it was any colder in Scotland. He cited benefits that Scotland had received from the budget such as the decision not to raise the duty on whisky and the North Sea measures."

The result was that he jokingly advised the Scots who felt the cold to take a dram. That is a real insult added to

[Mrs. Ewing]

injury. I hope that we can have a total denial that that is the attitude. Marie Antoinette went down in history as saying:"Let them eat cake." We may well have a Downing street statement recorded in history as "Let the cold and the needy drink whisky." I certainly could not endorse that.

The key is to stop this whole idea progressing. I welcome the fact that we have seen some honesty and decency on the Conservative Benches, where hon. Members have spoken with vehemence and passion about the fact that they will rebel tonight in the Lobbies. But I reiterate that if we are unsuccessful in defeating the Government tonight, we need more than tinkering with the social security system. There must be that automatic allowance.

That view was endorsed by Professor Malcolm Johnson, director of the department of health and social welfare at the Open university, in January 1991. He said:

"There ought to be extra help available automatically in the winter months for all of those at risk.

In mild winters, like the last four years, the Goverment might argue that would risk wasting public funds . In my view, that is better than risking people's lives."

I endorse that view.

Finally, the Government claim that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel will fulfil the Rio agreement and encourage energy conservation. Far too many people have been conserving energy for far too long at the expense of their health. All of us as Members of Parliament see in our constituencies young families suffering from bronchitis and asthmatic conditions, and the dampness in their houses. Part of the reason for that is that they have conserved energy because they are on low incomes. We see the same impact on the elderly and disabled, whose plight has been eloquently described.

Conservation of energy can come in many ways. My suggestion to the Government is an all-out programme on conserving energy. We could renovate our houses, ensure adequate insulation and ensure that houses were brought up to the highest standards. That would both give people decent homes and reduce the dole queues. As has been said, one of the reasons why the Exchequer does not receive much from income tax is that so many people are on the dole. Let us use the talents and skills that exist to start a programme of energy conservation by improving our housing stock.

The Government have taken a mean-spirited approach that is short-sighted and ham-fisted, and is designed not to improve conservation but to line the Exchequer's coffers. It does so at the risk of increasing the number of deaths from hypothermia—deaths to which, in 1991, Scotland contributed one sixth of the United Kingdom total.

Sir Teddy Taylor: In this rather disappointing and gloomy debate, the one joy for me was the speech made by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He spoke of the situation with great honesty and integrity, not hiding anything, telling us some rather alarming financial statistics that have never before been revealed. If we are looking for what some people have asked for—the answer to Newbury—it must lie, as we can see from the Chief Secretary's speech, in telling the truth. I must emphasise that in Southend, East we do not have a Newbury problem. I am glad to tell the Committee that every Conservative seat was held with a good majority, there were no losses to Labour and the Liberal vote hardly existed. However, that is not the relevant factor.

The relevant factor is what on earth we do. Although we fully appreciate that to put VAT on gas, electricity and other fuels will undoubtedly cause hardship, distress and misery and might cause special problems in the north of Scotland where, without doubt, people suffer more from cold weather over a continuous period, colleagues must ask themselves what they would do. The Chief Secretary explained that Britain's debts were getting out of control. That is probably the wrong phrase to use, because the Treasury never admits that anything is out of control. However, it accepts that, after a period under the previous Prime Minister when we were paying back debt, we now have a horrible situation in which we are borrowing more than £1,000 million a week and it is difficult to carry on with that.

More frightening was the Chief Secretary's explanation that that was not likely to be a temporary problem and that by 1996 we would still have horrendous problems in raising funds simply to make ends meet. We are all aware —there is no point in hiding it—that taxation as a whole, as a share of our gross national income, has been rising consistently, as it has been in most other countries. As the burdens of the welfare system increase, as the Government engage in more and more daft spending schemes, the amount of money that we have to spend increases. Here again, we must ask colleagues what on earth they would do in that situation.

It was also splendid of the Chief Secretary to accept that not only is the situation serious, it is getting worse. There is a perfect example of that in tonight's *Evening Standard*, which always has jewels of wisdom about spending. It has an article about this wonderful thing called the Eurojet, which is a remarkable attempt by four European countries to build a plane in pieces, and thereby do it more quickly. The article explained that we have been suddenly told that it will cost 50 per cent. more than was estimated.

7.15 pm

The Ministry of Defence, which is not well informed by the Treasury, has said that the rise in the estimated cost from £21 billion to £32 billion, which it does not deny, is not a 50 per cent. rise in costs, because 40 per cent. is due to inflation. It must be anticipating a sharp rise in inflation. It may be wrong—Ministries often are, and the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence do not have the best record for accuracy—but, whatever the reason for it, someone will have to pay for that sudden huge sharp increase. We have to ask colleagues who will pay and how it will be paid.

We also know, sadly, that there will be a huge increase in the amount of spending on agriculture, both at home and abroad. We shall be spending far more on farmers. Spending on the common agricultural policy is at an all-time record and it is going up to £31 billion. We all know that the CAP is crazy, socially divisive and damaging to the poor and to the third world, but there is nothing that we can do about it. Someone will have to pay for all the extra cost and we have to ask who will pay it and how it will be paid.

The Treasury has only two options. It can either impose this nasty VAT charge, which will cause so much damage, or sharply increase income tax, either through a special

extra tax on high-income earners or a general increase. Normally, one would think that it would be less socially divisive, and less damaging to the poor and the pensioners, if we went for an increase in income tax, but the last thing that we want to do when we are recovering from an appalling recession is to put up income tax. Nothing could be more damaging to a recovery.

Therefore, we have to make the horrible decision to impose VAT on gas and electricity. I hope that colleagues will face up to the matter honestly and directly, as the Chief Secretary did in his splendid speech. The worst thing that we could do is to follow the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls)—unfortunately, he has left the Chamber—that the answer is to put VAT on gas and electricity but to exclude as many people as possible. We know that those on pensions and income support will be excluded to some extent. My hon. Friend suggested that those above the level should be excluded in some nice way. If we excluded all the nice pensioners above the level by giving them Government grants, we would then have to deal with those with big mortgages, those with big families, those with good war records, those who have a big deficit in their accounts with Lloyds bank or other City banks. The more people we exclude, the more the remaining few people will have to pay.

I have always taken the view, particularly after my limited experience as an unsuccessful Scottish Member of Parliament when I saw so much money poured into rather silly schemes, that it would be much better if we adopted my suggestion that we should simply send aeroplanes to drop £10 notes, or perhaps £50 notes, in constituencies where there are farmers, because that would ensure that it was better directed, and the money was more closely targeted, than it is when we attempt to target certain sectors and people.

Nothing is worse than people saying that they will do something nasty, but finding a clever way to exclude all those whom they think are rather important, particularly at a difficult political time. We should not ignore, or deny, the fact that the tax will be horrible and nasty. However, we have to ask people how on earth the money can be raised without it.

The Chancellor explained that, of the £10 billion extra that the Budget will bring, that measure will account for £2·5 billion. That is a huge sum of money. It is almost as much as the EC spends in three weeks dumping and destroying food. We cannot ignore that much money. It is almost as much as Britain will pay as its contribution to the EC next year. If we cannot get that extra money through the imposition of VAT, what shall we do?

Apart from the options that I have mentioned, there is only the option of borrowing more. If the Government decide to borrow more, someone will have to pay for that borrowing eventually—even the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge, whether they are pensioners with good war records or pensioners who could not fight because of disabilities. We should encourage the Government to provide some exemptions.

We must face up to the fact that the economy is in a horrible mess and borrowing is alarmingly high. We simply must secure more money. I hope that, at the same time, we shall concentrate on finding a real solution to the problem—and the only real solution is returning people to work. I hope, Mr. Cormack, that it is not out of order for me to say that those who, like me, hate the VAT increase —who think it horrible, and accept that it will be damaging—hope that the Government will think carefully about a five-minute plan which, in my view, would do more than anything else to retore confidence.

We know that it was the grand work of the Foreign Office—I note that Ministers always run out of the Chamber when the Foreign Office is mentioned—that took us into the exchange rate mechanism. I urge the Minister to make the following statement: "We are imposing the VAT rate, but we want to make it abundantly clear that, because we lost so much money and had to charge so much extra tax following the nightmare of the ERM, we will not return to a fixed exchange rate." That would remove a great deal of uncertainty and would restore a great deal of faith to everyone except the Confederation of British Industry, which receives plenty of EC grants for all the important work that it does for the Community. Everyone except the CBI—and, of course, the National Farmers Union—would be very happy. Given such policy stability, people would know where they were going.

Let us say in all sincerity that the Chief Secretary's speech provided the Government with an answer to the Newbury problem. The answer is to describe things as they are—to tell people the truth. I believe that, if the Government adopted such an approach, many of our current problems simply would not arise. It might remove all the political uncertainties if the Minister told the Committee clearly and precisely—I know that he is always clear and precise—whether, once the 17·5 per cent. rate has been introduced in two years' time, it will be possible for a Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or even Scottish nationalist Government to do anything about it.

According to advice that I have received from the Library and from my friends, once the rate has been imposed, we shall find that we cannot reverse it, because of the sixth EC directive, as amended. Perhaps the Government will act further to remove political uncertainties by telling us whether it is true that, subject to a minor technical adjustment—as a result of the Economic and Finance Council meeting that took place in September last year—all the zero rates and other nice things will have to go by the end of 1996.

I learned that from a House of Commons Library paper. Its authors may have been misguided as a result of information from the Ministry of Defence and others, but this is something that we must know. I admired the Chief Secretary's speech: he is a good chap, and he spoke fairly, honestly and sincerely. His was one of the best ministerial speeches that I have heard for a long time—very fair, very reasonable and very precise. None the less, I hope that the Paymaster General will remove the two minor doubts that I have mentioned.

We may have been misinformed. Perhaps the House of Commons Library does not know what it is talking about, although it is staffed by sincere, hard-working people. Perhaps the paper that it produced on the 1996 issue was not clear. The public, however, understandably want to know the facts in the current serious economic circumstances. They are entitled to those facts, and I hope that the Paymaster General will clarify the position.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend clarify the position for me? He has spoken eloquently—and, I think, rightly—about the pernicious European dimension to the proposed application of VAT

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

to domestic fuel. Does he agree that, were Her Majesty's Government to get a grip on public spending and to slash social security spending—which has been spiralling out of control—by the time of the combined autumn statement and Budget, they could reconsider this pernicious impost, thus easing the worries of many old and sick people?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sure that the Government could do many things; however, despite my admiration for what my hon. Friend has said, we cannot discuss the issue on clause 42. I have suggested some steps that the Government could take to improve their policies—some may be bad, while others may be more sensible. Basically, however, I believe that we must find out whether we have the power to change the position once it has been put in place, and whether we are committed to dispensing with all the zero ratings by 1996.

I hope that hon. Members will have the courage and determination to face up to the fact that we are in a bit of a mess, that we need a good deal more money and that there is no readily available way of obtaining that money without holding back recovery. If the Government persist with the honesty, integrity and straightforwardness demonstrated by the Chief Secretary's speech, many of our current problems with the business and, indeed, the general community will probably disappear. I believe that, if we tell the truth—no matter how harsh the message may be—we shall receive the support that we deserve.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The speech of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor)—especially his description of the Chief Secretary—sounded suspiciously like a vote for the Chief Secretary to take the Chancellor's job when the Chancellor is sacked in July.

Anyone who was canvassing in the Newbury by-election or the county council elections in recent weeks will know that the proposal to impose VAT on fuel was deeply unpopular among voters. Indeed, it was one of the principal reasons for the Government's defeat in Newbury, and the bad results that it achieved in the council elections throughout the country. If, as the Prime Minister has promised, the Government are to learn the lessons of those dreadful defeats, they must recognise the force of one of those lessons and refuse to implement the Budget proposals for increases in VAT on fuel and power.

The Government should also apologise to the electorate for lying about the increases before the general election. They refused to admit that, all along, they were likely to increase the tax burden, because the sums did not add up—the public sector finance strategy put them in line for such a move—or, perhaps, because of the incompetence with which they pursued their economic policies.

The Government's own publication, "Social Trends", shows that the most vulnerable members of the community will be hardest hit by VAT increases. According to the latest edition,

"Generally speaking, the lower down the socio-economic scale a household is, a larger proportion of their total spending goes on the necessities of . . . fuel, light and power."

Table 6·3 shows that the professional classes spend just 3·2 per cent. of overall household expenditure on fuel, light and power, while unskilled manual workers and retired people spend 6·1 and 7·1 per cent. respectively—double the amount spent by the professional classes. According to the Government's own statistics, the most vulnerable in our community will be hardest hit—the old, the poor and the disabled.

The Chief Secretary—who is himself extremely wealthy—does not begin to understand how dreadfully the VAT increase will hit ordinary families and individuals, including pensioners and others on low incomes. The increase will average about £5 a week, perhaps reaching as much as £10 in the case of some families.

Those increases are attributable to the imposition of VAT. They amount to a great deal of money for someone who is on supplementary benefit, or for low-income families in my Neath constituency. It is diabolical that they should have to bear this burden, on top of the already exorbitant fuel charges that they have cope with.

It is essential that the Government back down and refuse to apply VAT to standing charges. Standing charges should be abolished for the poorest people in our society, especially for elderly citizens on income support. Many of them pay more in standing charges than they do for their gas or electricity, where gas or electricity, are subsidiary to their main fuel and power needs. The imposition of VAT could result in their standing charges increasing by nearly a fifth. That is completely unacceptable. It is a burden which they will find intolerable.

7.30 pm

The Government claim that they will compensate those on benefit for the imposition of VAT on fuel and power, but they have never said that they will compensate them fully. All that the Government have said is that they will compensate them in some yet to be described fashion. I invite the Minister—I shall be happy to allow him to intervene during my speech, if he wishes to respond—to say what the position will be if the fuel bill of a pensioner in my constituency goes up by £5 a week. If that pensioner is on income support, will he or she get £5 a week extra in income support, benefit, or some other entitlement? Will that £5 increase in fuel charges be compensated for directly by a £5 increase in benefit?

I invite the Minister to intervene and confirm whether that will be the case. I see that he does not intend to do so. Therefore, I can only assume that that will not happen, that a one-for-one matching compensation will not occur and that some of the worst off in our constituencies will consequently suffer the most.

The point has already been by some Conservative Members that the worst affected will not be just those on benefits. In some ways, those who will be worst affected will be people who are just above income support level—people who receive no income support, or housing benefit, or benefit of any kind. Many of my constituents have told me that they have a small miner's pension, or a miner's widow's pension, which takes them just above, painfully above, the benefit threshold. Nevertheless, it is a trivial amount, when set against their living costs. They are the ones who will be the worst hit by this VAT increase, for they will receive no compensation.

The result, not just for those people but for ordinary families who are at their wits' end over trying to cope with their fuel bills, will be that they switch off the gas and electricity and freeze. Some of them will therefore die of hypothermia and other consequences of extremely cold weather.

To the many anomalies that were drawn to the Committee's attention by the hon. Member for Moray

(Mrs. Ewing) concerning the trigger mechanisms for cold weather payments, I wish to add another. In my constituency, the village of Seven Sisters, which is up one of the valleys, is about 20 miles away from the weather station at the Mumbles. In bitter weather, it can be 3 or 4 deg warmer at the Mumbles than at Seven Sisters. Cold weather payments at Seven Sisters, however, are triggered by the weather station at the Mumbles. Consequently, although the people of Seven Sisters may literally be freezing, the fact that the cold weather payment is triggered by a weather station some miles away—where the temperature is much higher because it is on the coast—means that they are not entitled to it. That anomaly will be made even worse by the exorbitant additional charges that will arise from the imposition of VAT.

Another aspect of this sorry story affects Wales directly. I understand that British Gas in Wales has irrecoverable debts—money that it cannot get back from some of the poorest in our communities or from businesses that have gone bankrupt. That irrecoverable amount totals £6 million a year. The imposition of VAT on fuel and power will lead to that sum rising by another £1 million a year.

Who will pay for that, in the end? Those who pay for it will be ordinary gas customers in Wales, including pensioners who are the least able to afford it. They will be hit both directly and indirectly. That will be the consequence of the Government's short-sighted and punitive policy. It is a consequence which, so far, seems to have been overlooked.

The Home Secretary admitted yesterday on radio that the Government are in a hole. They certainly are. That is partly because there is a massive hole in the Government's public finances. The Chief Secretary referred to it in his speech. I shall comment on some of the points that he made.

This VAT imposition is intended to plug the hole in the Government's public finances. They claim that there is some sort of economic recovery. It would be astonishing if there were not an upturn, after the interest rate reduction from 15 to 6 per cent. and the devaluation of the pound by nearly 18 per cent.—at least, until a few months ago. The laws of economic gravity would be defied if there were not an upturn of some sort. That upturn, however, if it is happening, has happened despite the Government, not because of their policies and objectives, and it will be short lived. It is very shallow. That is why the Government are having desperately to cast around for remedies, such as the additional revenue that they will get from imposing VAT on fuel and power.

Another factor in the equation to which the Chief Secretary referred is the massive public sector borrowing level of £50 billion, or 8 per cent. of GDP. I do not share his optimism. I do not believe that it will decrease significantly over the next few years. It will remain high and will almost reach that level. All the economic indicators for the Government point in an extremely negative direction. For instance, the massive balance of payments gap is running at £1 billion a month. That will increase the Government's difficulties and put a strain on public finances. The balance of payments gap will increase still further, if there is any upturn in consumption.

Unemployment will similarly increase. The unemployed will suffer, along with everybody else. Indeed, they will suffer more from the imposition of VAT on fuel and power, for they, too, are among the poorest in the community. More people will join the dole queues in the coming months and the coming year, despite the somewhat massaged turnaround over the past few months in the official unemployment figures.

The imposition of VAT on electricity, gas, coal, oil and other fuels has to be seen against the background of personal debt having doubled since the Government came to power in 1979. Families are now more and more stretched and more and more unable to pay the expected fuel increases. In 1981, for example, for every £100 of disposable income, household debt was £57. By 1990, that figure had doubled to £114. Since then, household debt has increased still further. These are difficult times for many families. For many people, the imposition of VAT on fuel and power will be the last straw.

The upturn that is coming—if, indeed, it manages to stutter along—is consumption-driven. We know, however, that consumption, as a proportion of gross domestic product, is far too high in Britain, that it increased to record levels in 1990 and that it has increased still further since then.

That helps to paint in the background of the economic difficulties that are facing the Government. The economy will not grow. We shall not be able to generate sufficient revenue to plug the hole in the Government's finances and facilitate the withdrawal of the proposed VAT increases. The economy is burdened by too much debt and by a life style among ordinary families that is based too much on a level of consumption that is far outstripping the economy's capacity to produce the wealth that we need.

We needed from the Budget not a consumption-driven economy but an investment-driven economy. It should have addressed the structural weaknesses in the economy, not the short-termism that the Chancellor has pursued throughout his tenure of office and which is reflected in the clause.

Many hon. Members will have received a submission from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which points out:

"the Budget will have a serious impact on charities' finances. The measures to encourage giving to charities are far outweighed by the imposition of VAT on fuel and power and the reduction in the value of tax credits on dividends."

In other words, what the Budget gave to charities with one hand is more than taken by the other with the VAT increases on fuel and power.

VAT on fuel and power will add about £50,000 a year to the RNLI's heating and lighting bills, of which £16,000 will arise in boat house crew rooms, which are so important to safety at sea. The RNLI points out that it is true that, with the reduction in gift aid thresholds, gift aid tax payments will increase. A good part of that arises from the switch from covenant income, on which tax repayments will fall. The gift aid improvement, although it is welcome, goes little way to compensate for the new impositions of the Budget, one of the most pernicious of which is the VAT increase on fuel light and power.

The Government have claimed, rather dishonestly, that this is a green measure. If they wanted to introduce a green measure, they would adopt the clear and carefully costed proposals that have been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). His programme for home insulation is entirely self-financing and would reduce the cost of electricity, gas and other fuel bills and would not impose a burden on the Exchequer.

Britain's home insulation standards are the worst in Europe. The Budget could have tackled that problem by implementing the programme that has been proposed by the Labour party. Instead, the Government went for the option that has nothing to do with environmental safeguards but is intended to get in the billions of pounds that they need to plug the hole in their public finances.

The proposed increase will be highly inflationary not only for the worst off members of our community but for the whole economy. The retail price index is already going up. The Government's target of increasing the RPI within a range of 1 to 4 per cent. is already under strain and the warning signals are flashing. All the signs are that we shall reach a target of above 4 per cent.—perhaps 5 per cent. or more—by next year.

The Government are mistakenly allowing the pound to creep up because they think that it will choke off the increase in import prices and in other respects reduce the pressure on inflation. They are so concerned about inflation that they are allowing the pound to float up, but they should be reducing interest rates and not worrying too much about whether the pound floats up or down.

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. Patrick Cormack): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going a little wide of the subject and many of his colleagues wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Hain: I am grateful, Mr. Cormack; I shall bring my remarks to a close.

The inflationary pressure that will result from this VAT increase will have a serious effect on the economy generally and will catch the Government up in terms of the impact of their other fiscal and monetary policies. Why should poor, old and disabled people pay for the Government's incompetence? This is a vindictive measure by a vindictive Chancellor who will lose his job soon. The only saving grace of the measure is its incompetence. Its effect will be felt at such at time in the electoral cycle that it will bite off the Government's hopes and end their prospects of being re-elected.

7.45 pm

Mr. Dicks: I had not intended to take part in the debate, but I was concerned by not so much what the Chief Secretary said as, to some extent, the tone in which he said it. Some Back Benchers who have doubts were hoping for some words that would help us to support the Government tonight. Those words were not forthcoming, but I hope that by the end of the evening something will be said that will offer us some encouragement.

Politics is about perception. Something may be a fact, but if it is perceived differently we must act on the perception. On this issue, the perception is that the imposition of VAT is bad. That may or may not be so, but that is the perception and hon. Members who have marginal seats must act on that.

The Government must be seen to be listening. The perception is that they are not, and this proposal is another example where there is some doubt about whether the Government realise what is going on in the real world outside the Palace of Westminster. I have said elsewhere and say again that if Ministers left their cars behind and left their contact with the field marshals, generals and people whom they meet at Buck house or Clarence house and instead spent their time knocking on doors, perhaps they would have a different view of what is going on.

Pensioners on and above income support must be heard. I have maintained for years publicly, locally and in here that pensioners are not getting a good enough deal —they never have. I have advocated for several years that between November and February pensioners should get £5 a week irrespective of the weather. If the weather is good, it is a bonus; and if it is not, the money is in their hand, ready to use if the cold weather comes. I fail to see why we cannot adopt that natural commonsense approach rather than wait until somebody on Air Ministry roof puts his finder in the air to decide what the temperature is and which way the wind is blowing. That is a nonsensical approach and should have been reconsidered a long time ago.

Several colleagues, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), have said that it is no good moaning unless alternatives can be suggested. I have some alternatives that will not be popular on either side of the Chamber, but I will give them anyway. First, we could reduce or do away with overseas aid, which would lead to a saving of £1·6 billion. The vast majority of that aid does not go where the people whose taxes fund it expect it to go. Much of it goes into the back pocket of the bureaucrats and tyrants who run Africa and elsewhere——

The Tempory Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman may refer briefly to other potential destinations, but he should not expound and expand on what he said.

Mr. Dicks: I take your rebuke, Mr. Cormack.

The alternative savings should come from the doing away with of overseas aid, saving £1·6 billion, and completely abolishing the arts budget, saving some £700 million. We should also consider the way in which we pay people who come here from abroad—immigrants, regardless of their colour or creed—and get payments immediately, having made no contribution to our society. We should also consider the gross waste of money on AIDS. About £886 million has been spent, but the real figure is probably more than £1 billion. We have done nothing about that. Money is still being wasted on it this year.

Those alternatives would lead to a saving of £2·5 billion to £3 billion. I have said before that that is how savings can be made. These are the issues that the chattering classes love. That is why the Government, who, unfortunately, react to the chattering classes, prefer to bang and hit the poor and pensioners, who cannot fight back and who the Government know they can take on and beat.

I accept the point that was made by my hon Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). In a sense, it is too late to make any real adjustments, although I hope, as I said earlier, that we will be told that some further consideration will be given to ensure that those who are just above the threshold get some help.

An old-age pensioner has written to me saying that she has some savings as a result of her and her husband's care and concern for 40 years. Her husband is now dead. She asks me why she should have to pay more when she has not been feckless and when she has done everything that a good Conservative should. The Government now tell people to think about their pensions early to ensure that

they are not a drain on the economy later. That lady and her husband did all that, yet now, because she has saved money and has not wasted it, she is being punished. I cannot believe that Ministers want that to happen.

I beg for some reassurance at 10 pm and for the Government to show that they have realised what is going on, that after last Thursday they are prepared to listen and that they are aware of people's perceptions. I ask Ministers to forget the advice that they get from the Treasury. The people there are the most incompetent crew. They have been wrong for years and they still get it wrong. The Treasury has the highest-paid permanent secretary for the smallest group of people. If we are to get anything right in the economy and if we are to ensure that our pensioners and our poor are not punished, the first thing to do is almost to close down the Treasury, because its advice is useless.

My many poor constituents—immigrants, Asians and the ordinary white poor—ask what on earth is going on if they have to be punished when people can be given——

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dicks: No.

Those constituents ask what on earth is going on when people can get a £30 gift from the Government to watch an opera as a leisure pursuit. We say that we can afford to do that, but that we cannot afford to help the poor, and we say that we must put VAT on their fuel. I have taken heed of your rebuke, Mr. Cormack. I could have said a lot more. I simply say to the Government, "For God's sake listen, for God's sake understand and for God's sake give us some hope at 10 pm so that we can support the Government and not the Opposition."

Mr. Winnick: If the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is really concerned about pensioners, he knows what to do at 10 pm. He will go into the Lobby and vote against the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. If, despite the hon. Gentleman's populist or pseudo-populist remarks, he is really committed to the cause of pensioners, he has a duty and responsibility. We shall watch carefully to see what he does at 10 pm

Fuel poverty is undoubtedly one of the worst aspects of the winter months for pensioners and for others on low incomes. The Government propose to add to the misery suffered by so many people whose only crime is to be old, to have retired or to be on a low income. Those people will be punished. The Chief Secretary gave some explanation and some rationale for the proposal, and he spoke about the financial problems facing the Government.

They are financial and economic problems of the Government's own making. Unfortunately for our country, the Government have been in office for 14 years; they are not a Government who have just been elected. The Government say that they face formidable problems. The people who will suffer are those who are least able to bear the burden.

The report published recently by the social policy research unit at the university of York shows that it is precisely the low-income households that spend a far higher proportion of their income on fuel. The report shows that the proportion of a single pensioner's weekly budget spent on fuel now is just over 18 per cent. By 1995, as a result of the Government's imposition of VAT on domestic fuel, the proportion spent on fuel will be more than 20 per cent.—one fifth of a single pensioner's income. We know only too well the low incomes that so many pensioners have.

The *Sunday Express*, which is not a newspaper usually associated with the Labour party, wrote about the misery faced by so many pensioners on low incomes during the cold weather two years ago. The newspaper wrote about one widow, whom it named, who lived in Worthing, and described her low income at the time. I do not suppose that, if that good lady is alive and well—we all hope she is —her income has increased except as a result of the pension increase in line with inflation.

The article says:

"She has no money left for heating during a big freeze. At night she wears thick pyjamas, three pullovers and woollen socks—and covers herself with three blankets.

Most of the day she sits in front of the television wearing all these—and a blue scarf and check blanket."

The article says that she enjoyed watching television. It continues:

"Of the freezing weather she says"—

I hope that the Committee bears this point in mind, because it relates very much to what we are discussing now and to the further afflictions being imposed on people such as this lady—

"'I hate it. My body keeps shivering but it's my hands that feel it most. They are so cold I can't close my fingers or grip anything. I rub my hands to keep them warm, but after a while they get cold again. And I get too tired to keep rubbing them together.'"

That is one pensioner. There are many like her. In my constituency and in constituencies throughout the country, there are the people about whom I have been speaking—the poor and the old who are frightened and terrified of the winter weather because they simply do not have enough money to keep their accommodation adequately heated.

I make no apology for the fact that, time after time during very cold spells, I have referred to the fact that the cold weather payments have not been triggered. During the speech by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), I made the point that, according to information I have received from the Library, during this year only one out of 61 weather stations has triggered the cold weather payment. The reason is that, at the 60 other stations, it has not been freezing for seven consecutive days.

What a farce. Even if it is not freezing, it can be bad enough, as we all know. If the temperature reaches freezing point for one or two days, it is of no use: the money will not be paid. The temperature has to be at freezing point for seven consecutive days, at the end of which the grand sum of £6 a week is paid.

The problem is important for many of our fellow citizens. We know that so many of the elderly try to spend much of the day during the winter months out of their homes. They go to libraries or to other communal buildings to find warmth and to save on fuel expenses at home. When they put on, as they must do, some form of heating, they often heat only one room. They heat only one room for the same reason as we would in such circumstances. They are no different from us; they are our fellow citizens, and they are not living on another planet or on another continent. Facing the same problems, we should do the same.

In the main, it is not the elderly who face fuel debt. The reason is that they are so worried about using fuel for which they cannot pay. That is why they put their health at risk, and that is why they are so terrified of the winter.

[Mr. Winnick]

That is also why the Committee should be deeply concerned that so many of our retired people are in such terror during the winter months and that is why we should do our utmost to help them.

One Conservative Member, the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), has told us that he will vote against the Government. He has courage, and he knows his duty and his responsibility to his constituents. He will vote with us at 10 pm. What about other Conservative Members? We have heard some of them, such as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, express their concern. What help will they give their constituents if they give their loyalty to the Government? Will they not be in the position they were in when they voted for the poll tax and later deeply regretted it?

If they feel concern, however reluctant they may be to vote against their own Government and however reluctant they may be to go into the Lobby with Labour Members, they should know their duty when the Division is called. They should understand their duty to their constituents who are in the plight that I have described.

8 pm

For pensioners, the position was made worse by what happened in 1980, when the Government decided—the Chief Secretary said nothing of this today—that pensions should increase in line with inflation and not in line with earnings. The latest information is that, as a result of that decision 13 years ago, married couples have lost £26 and single pensioners around £15 every week. That decision was unfair and unjust and has made it that much more difficult for pensioners to cope.

There is much talk about the improved living standards of some pensioners. It is true that the position of some pensioners who have retired since 1980 and who have occupational pensions is not as acute as that which I have described. In many cases, however, the occupational pension is small—and what about all the other pensioners who retired when there were no ocupational schemes and who have to rely purely and simply, as so many do, on the state pension scheme.

The plight of pensioners has been affected not only by the decision made in 1980 but by subsequent changes in housing benefit. Many people come to my surgery or write to me asking why they have to find so much in rent and poll tax—or, as it now is, council tax—out of their very limited income. I write to the local authority and ask for an explanation, and I know what explanation I will get: since 1988, local authorities have had no discretion in housing benefit matters. Housing benefit decisions are made by central Government.

My hon. Friends may be interested to hear that I always send the local authorities' replies to the Minister concerned, and the Minister's reply to my constituent. My constituent may not be happy with the position, but at least he then knows that it is the result of a decision taken not by his local authority but by the Government. The policy decision made in 1988, as a result of which many on small incomes paid more in rent and rates, then poll tax and now council tax, has done much to undermine the living standards of many of our constituents.

An essential requirement in a developed society is the right to have one's home adequately heated. Unfortunately, owing to poverty, many cannot exercise that right in Britain. The Government intend to punish those who are most vulnerable to increased fuel costs.

The headline in today's edition of *The Times* refers to the Prime Minister's advice to his colleagues that the Government—and certainly Cabinet Ministers—should not appear to be so arrogant. It seems to me to be the height of arrogance to push through a proposal such as this. There is not a single Minister, in the Cabinet or outside it, who is ignorant of the hardship that the decision is likely to inflict. What is the use of the Prime Minister saying that the Government should show less arrrogance while pushing through schemes that are so wrong and so unpopular?

Much has been said about last Thursday's decisions, both in the by-election and in the county council elections. People may vote differently on different occasions, and I would be out of order were I to try to speculate on what future general election results might be; but there is no doubt whatever that the Government are deeply unpopular.

They are unpopular not simply because of the recession and high unemployment, although they are bad enough, but because of proposals such as this. Similar considerations applied in respect of the poll tax. Many people who could afford to pay and who paid the poll tax knew that it was wrong and unjust that other people earning so much less than them should be paying the same poll tax. They punished the Government on the appropriate occasion.

Many people on reasonable incomes who can afford to pay VAT on domestic fuel and power know and understand that it is wrong for the Government in office to punish the old and those on low incomes, who have a tremendous struggle to survive during the winter months.

My hon. Friend the shadow Chief Secretary referred to the fact that proportionately more elderly people die during the winter months in this country than in other western European countries. Does any Conservative Member believe that there is no link between the large number of deaths we have here, as compared with other European countries, and the poverty that prevents people from keeping their accommodation adequately heated?

The arrogance of the Government is clear. What is being done is wrong. I only hope that, if there are enough Conservative Back Benchers who agree with us that it is wrong, they will have the courage to do their duty to their constituents when it comes to the vote at 10 pm.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): Several hon. Members have spoken about the effect on charities of the imposition of VAT on fuel and power. All hon. Members are united in their admiration and support for the work that charities do. I know that the Government share that feeling. One has only to remember the large cash support that has been given to voluntary organisations to appreciate that fact.

I am concerned, however—I know that I speak on behalf of the all-party disablement group—that the removal of zero rating from fuel and power used by charities in the provision of residential care and in the form of grants paid to those on low incomes will have a far-reaching effect on those charities' ability to provide services for the elderly, the sick and the disabled and care for the dying. Unlike local government or businesses engaged in similar activities, those charities will be unable to recover VAT paid on their fuel bills.

Over the past decade or so, as the level of VAT has risen in stages, I have been involved in and have supported the campaign by the Charities Tax Reform Group, which represents some 300 leading charities and which was once chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health.

That group has campaigned for a system of relief on or repayment of VAT paid by charities. We hoped that such a system would be granted in the current Budget. Strong representations were made to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary in the run-up to it, and my right hon. Friend is fully aware of the implications for our leading charities of the change in the VAT regime.

In successive Budgets, the Government have responded to the pressure exerted on them with all sorts of increases in tax relief for donations. Those measures signal the importance that the Government attach to charities. They have tried to reimburse charities in different ways through different sorts of reliefs. In the present Budget, charitable giving has been encouraged through measures on payroll giving and gift aid, and I warmly welcome them. On the other side of the coin, charities face greater difficulties on their expenditure side, and the proposed fuel and heating tax will bear down extremely heavily on these already hard-pressed organisations.

It is an inescapable medical fact that elderly, ill and disabled people tend to require higher temperatures than the population in general. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spoke of the needs of the elderly, but the sick and the disabled are also known to require special help with the temperature of their accommodation. For example, cancer manifests itself in a need for extra warmth, even in the summer months. Cancer sufferers require extra help with heating.

The direct needs of people who are cared for by charities produce intensive use of energy. Residential homes have a duty of care to their residents which limits their ability to reduce their heating on either cost or energy efficiency grounds. It is not that simple a choice. Indeed, there is no choice if they are serious about fulfilling caring responsibilities.

Wearing one of my other hats in parliamentary affairs, I have spoken often in the House about the need for energy efficiency. Extending VAT to fuel and power goes some part of the way to help Britain meet its environmental objectives and international obligations on CO_2 emissions that were agreed at the Rio Summit. On that, the Government must be congratulated.

However, the laudable aims of environmental protection cannot and must not take absolute priority over the needs of the weakest members of our society. For that reason, I ask the Government to give further consideration to the special and limited concerns of charities. We all know that charities which provide residential care cannot simply turn down the heating to compensate for increased fuel costs.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) mentioned disability aids. Those aids enable people to live as independent a life as possible. Grant-making charities, which provide money to those in need of help with their heating demands will also have to cope with increased requirements on their resources, whatever assistance is given in the autumn to people on low incomes. For example, the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund expects a large increase in requests for help with fuel bills. In 1992, the fund disbursed more than £3 million in grants to patients, of which £850,000—by far the largest category—was in specific grants for fuel.

The Abbeyfield society will face an extra VAT cost of more than half a million pounds. Mencap will face an extra burden of £200,000 per year. There is a list of all the charities and the amounts that they will require. The cost to the charities will be about £27 million a year.

There is a continuing discussion about the introduction of VAT on fuel and heating. It is likely that, because the focus of the debate has been on the general issue, the specific anxieties of charities have had little chance of being aired before today. Therefore, the Government have had little opportunity to respond to those specific anxieties.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport)' I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I have agreed with many of them. If he is sincere in his concern for charities, will it be reflected in his vote tonight?

Sir John Hannam: If the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself until I reach the conclusion of my speech, he will hear the answer to that question. The answer is related to the points that I am making.

Mr. Jamieson: Is that no?

Sir John Hannam: It may be.

The Temporary Chairman: Order. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) has just entered the Chamber. By intervening, he may prevent some of his colleagues, some of whom have been here for a long time, from making a speech.

Sir John Hannam: It is easy for Opposition Members to taunt Conservative Members and try to persuade them to declare how they intend to vote. That is an understandable ploy, but it does not relate to the facts of the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said that, in a debate on the Finance Bill, it was impractical to attempt to change the centre core of a Budget proposal to a large extent. If one takes out part of the core, one destroys the whole Budget. Of course, it is possible to change parts of the Finance Bill. That is why amendments have been tabled. I support that.

To answer the question of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, I am working towards attempting to change the Government's attitude to a part of their proposal. I support the overall proposal in principle on environmental grounds, as I have explained, but I am worried about the part of it which affects charities.

8.15 pm

In the representations which I and other hon. Members and representatives of the various charities made to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Treasury Ministers during the run-up to the budget, the point was pursued that, because there had been successive impositions of VAT on charities, some attempt should be made to allow charities to benefit from a VAT refund system or zero rating.

In his Budget speech, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor acknowledged the need to compensate people in receipt of benefits. This debate is the time to put that into practice and for the Government to find a way of minimising the impact of such a change on charities. I hope that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will give

an assurance at the end of the debate that, between now and Report stage, further discussions will be held so that we know that the impact of the VAT change on charities will be carefully considered.

It is a fact that charities which provide residential care and grants do not have the chance to recover VAT, as local authorities or others who operate residential homes do. Charities are in a unique position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said that, if zero rating was removed from fuel, it could not be reapplied at a future date. That worries charities deeply. The campaign for zero rating for charities and specifically disablement charities has been maintained for several years. If zero rating cannot be reintroduced once it has gone, that is of great significance to charities.

I argue strongly that, between now and Report stage, the Government should carry forward the discussions held with the charities and the Charities Tax Reform group to a point at which some way of alleviating the impact of the VAT charge can be found. If we do not find a way, I and others who have been involved in the campaign will consider carefully how best we can exert our influence to obtain help for the charities.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

The Temporary Chairman: Order. It may help the House to know that the Chair has neither the power nor the desire to limit speeches, but that seven hon. Members who have said that they wish to speak. If they limit their speeches to 10 minutes or thereabouts, they should all get in. If they do not, they will not.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): It is fascinating for Opposition Members to watch Conservative Members wriggle around about the proposal to impose VAT on fuel and heating. They know that it is unfair. They know that it is a vote loser. Moreover, they know that it will hit them in the run-up to the next general election. But many of them lack the guts to follow the logic of their arguments and vote against the measure tonight. That is precisely the craven attitude on the part of Tory Members, who voted for the poll tax although they knew it was a disaster, which thrust us into that long saga that wasted billions of pounds of taxpayers' money.

The proposal to impose VAT on fuel illustrates one of the recurring themes of the 14 years of Tory Government. Tories simply do not know the meaning of the word fair. The poll tax was killed despite all the protestations of the Treasury Bench and all the boasts that it would be the flagship of the Thatcher era. It was killed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, because it was widely felt, even by people who could afford to pay it, that it was simply unfair.

The reason why the imposition of VAT on fuel has angered the electorate so catastrophically for the Government is precisely the same. The Chief Secretary, that glamour boy of the Tory right, put the point better than I could have done myself. He said that putting VAT on fuel was for the Government a way of raising revenue which was consistent with their principles. Precisely. Throughout the Tory Administration we have seen them pursue policies which penalise the poorest and help the richest in their society.

It is worth while pointing out that, in the past decade —the Tory decade—for the first time in the history of modern capitalism, the established trend towards greater equality of income and wealth has come to a shuddering halt.

During the Thatcher era, those in the bottom 10 per cent. income group saw their incomes rise by a mere 12 per cent. while those in the top 10 per cent. saw their incomes rise by 38 per cent. Those in the top 1 per cent. income band, presumably including Mr. Asil Nadir, saw their incomes rise by a whacking 60 per cent. That was the hallmark of Thatcherism and Toryism in the 1980s. They took from the poor and gave to the wealthy.

I shall not waste time discussing the so-called environmental justification for the VAT proposals, because they are wholly fraudulent and cynical. I need cite only the findings of my Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee which, having taken evidence, including listening to the Chancellor, said that the proposals were designed primarily for revenue reasons.

But even if that Committee had not said that, the fact that VAT is to be imposed not simply on fuel consumption but on standing charges gives the game away, since standing charges do not relate to greater fuel savings. I agree with those who have said that standing charges for gas and electricity should be abolished because they bear most heavily on pensioners and the poor.

Opposition Members have opposed consistently—and will oppose them honourably in the Lobby tonight—the VAT proposals for three main reasons: their effect on the elderly and poor; the fact that they are not reversible; and because they pave the way for other economic attacks on the most vulnerable in society.

In Hackney there are over 25,000 retired people. I will not repeat the arguments that have been adduced about the effects of what the Government propose on the retired. The Chief Secretary entirely fails to understand, let alone meet, the arguments that bear on the special case of the elderly. The right hon. Gentleman harks on about the RPI. He must accept that that index is an average. The elderly often spend twice as much proportionately of their incomes on fuel. I refer not simply to the rich elderly but to all elderly, and that makes them a special case.

The elderly are a special case also because of the hypothermia issue. Turning down or doing without heating is not a question of choice or luxury for the majority of the elderly. For many of them, during the coming winter and winters to come, whether or not to have the heating on will be a matter of life or death.

Anyone who deals with the elderly, as most of us do —whether they are our relatives or constituents attending our surgeries—knows that those above retirement age have a morbid fear of debt. People of my age and the ages of most hon. Members do not have that fear. Whatever the Government may tell them about the RPI, compensation for this or that and council tax changes, many elderly people will be so frightened by the prospect of rising bills that they will resort to self-rationing. They will sit in the cold at risk to their health because of the fear of falling into debt. I cannot believe that Treasury Ministers conduct surgeries or meet the elderly. If they did, they would not be advocating such callous proposals.

We are told that people on income support and income support-related benefits will have those benefits uprated in line with the RPI. I have pointed out the deficiency of that approach, since the RPI is an average and the people for whom we are most concerned, the elderly and the poor,

pay disproportionate amounts of their income on fuel. Uprating their benefit by the average will not meet their problem.

We must consider those who are just above the income support level. Tory Members, and particularly Ministers, love to expound on social security scroungers and make out that millions of people are living on income support through choice. Nobody can seriously believe that. People do not live on that degree of benefit by choice. Focusing help solely on people on income support and income support-related benefits simply increases the poverty trap.

Many people are now dependent on housing benefit to pay their housing association or private sector rents. They dare not return to work because they could not afford to pay their rent if they came out of the income support category. We shall add to those millions the millions of people who will not dare return to work because they will be unable to pay their fuel bills, since they will no longer be in receipt of income support-related help. It represents a bitter poverty trap for the majority of people involved, who would prefer the dignity and freedom of working for a living, rather than being dependent on means-tested benefits.

Many Tory Members are trying to ease their consciences by talking about the Government's compensation package. They should, in the few hours remaining before we vote tonight, examine statements made by Ministers about that compensation package. I have noticed since the Budget speech that every Minister who opens his or her mouth about that package changes the nature of the compensation. Conservative Members are salving their consciences on the basis of an unseen compensation package, the contents of which vary from one speech to another. They are buying a pig in a poke and our constituents will make them pay for that.

We oppose the proposed changes because of their effect on the old and the poor. Also, contrary to what many Conservative Members claim, under EC law they are not reversible. In any event, they are just a curtain-raiser for imposing VAT on children's clothes and cuts in welfare spending. If we do not draw the line here in defending the old and the poor, the most vulnerable in society will pay the price for the Government's economic mismanagement.

It is incredible to note the way in which Ministers have wrung their hands about the public sector borrowing requirement. To hear them agonise over that is similar to listening to them agonise over law and order and the state of the schools. Who has been in power for the past 14 years? Whatever they say about the PSBR, my hon. Friends and I did not borrow the money. Whatever Opposition Back Benchers may have liked a Labour Government to do, under the tutelage of the canny Scotsmen on our Front Bench, we would not have run up the sort of PSBR that the present Government face.

The Tories are trying to claim that what they propose has been made necessary by unforeseen circumstances. They say that nobody knew that the recession would last so long. That is nonsense. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, among other bodies, said some years ago that the recession would be longer and deeper than the Government were anticipating.

Let us be blunt about whether the Prime Minister and others lied to the electorate before the last election. The answer is that they did. Many commentators and economists have said that the public sector borrowing figures released by the Government before the election were deliberately massaged downwards, since to have revealed the true figures would have been to reveal the need, soon after the election, to do precisely what the Government are doing, which is to put up direct and indirect taxes. If I am asked whether the Conservatives lied, the answer is that they did and one need only read the specialist press at the time to see that informed people could not understand how they produced such low PSBR figures.

At the last election, the Conservatives practised a fraud on the electorate. The first instalment of the price that they are having to pay for that occurred last Thursday. On behalf of the old and cold of Hackney, I hope that, in the coming general election, the Conservatives will pay the full price for their wholly fraudulent claim at the last election to be the party of low taxation.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I hope that the Government will give further thought to the impact of the extension of VAT on charities, particularly charities whose objects are the relief of poverty and support of the frail and needy. I hope that they will also think carefully about the predicament in which disabled people could find themselves in consequence of the extension of VAT to domestic fuel and power.

Having said that, I wish at the outset to make plain my belief that the Chancellor is right, in all the circumstances, to extend the VAT base and, in particular, to address the question of domestic fuel and power.

The fact is that we must pay more taxes. The Government's borrowing has grown beyond what almost anyone, even the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) with her crystal ball, foresaw a year ago, due to the continuation of exceptionally difficult economic conditions. If we were to allow that situation to continue, true hardship would result. Such borrowing would inevitably lead to high interest rates and high inflation and that would cause serious hardship not least to pensioners, who suffer most from high inflation.

8.30 pm

At its present level, the PSBR represents a real threat to sustained economic recovery. Our aspirations to provide public goods—education, health care and help to the needy—have been outrunning our willingness to pay for them. There should be no sacred cows in public expenditure and my right hon. Friends at the Treasury are right to look radically at the spending pattern that they have inherited and to search for unjustified items of public expenditure. Where the case for public provision is clear cut, however, my constituents and I would rather pay for it through taxes than stack up a dangerous burden of debt.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his courage. There are no tax increases that would be popular. Some hon. Members who acknowledge the importance of reducing the PSBR have blithely suggested that alternative remedies might have been found. It is an illusion to suppose that any alternative tax increase would not have been vehemently attacked just as irresponsibly and opportunistically by the Opposition.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right in his judgment about how to set about increasing taxation. After all, it is vital that we do not increase business taxes and knock the recovery on the head. It is sensible to avoid the disincentive of higher income tax.

My right hon. Friend is also right to adopt a long-range measure to protect the environment. His policy addresses two problems simultaneously and with equal validity—the problem of the PSBR and the need, in the interests of the environment, to reduce energy consumption. *[Interruption.]* Whatever their huffings and puffings, it is a certainty that, if the Labour party had had the opportunity, it would have extended VAT to domestic fuel and power. It would have been right to do so because that policy will make a significant impact on carbon dioxide emissions. It is right and necessary that we should introduce such a policy in accordance with the pledges that we made at the Earth summit in Rio.

The Government's policies have brought energy costs to consumers down, which has benefited households, but, at the same time, has tended to encourage additional consumption. My right hon. Friend was therefore right to bring households into line with businesses and, at the same time, bring United Kingdom taxation into line with that in other countries. Unlike the carbon tax, which the Liberal Democrats espouse—not a single member of that party is in the Chamber now—VAT on domestic fuel and power will have no damagiang impact on businesses.

I also congratulate my right hon. friend on his immediate acceptance of the need to help people on low incomes, who would be particularly affected by the change in VAT. He made that point immediately during his Budget statement and reiterated it when he wound up the Budget debate. There are two indispensable and intertwined strands in the Conservative tradition: the commitment to sound finance and the commitment to provide care for people in need.

My right hon. Friend has recognised that families on low incomes spend a larger proportion of their household budget on fuel and power than other families. He is well aware of the findings of the 1991 family expenditure survey, which revealed that the poorest 20 per cent. of households spent 11 per cent. of their weekly budget on fuel, whereas better-off households spent 5 per cent. and the wealthiest spent 3 per cent. My right hon. Friend has therefore promised to help people on low incomes by increasing income-related benefits and to do so by next April, before the new bills are due. That pledge is additional to the help that has been given in recent times to pensioners on income support.

I should like to ask my right hon. Friend to extend that sympathetic and practical approach to the charities that support the frail and the vulnerable. That would be in keeping with his pledge to help the poor and needy directly with their fuel costs and with the Government's admirable record of extending tax concessions to charities.

The Government, in their negotiations in the European Community on our behalf on the completion of the single market, have resolutely defended the fiscal reliefs that they have provided to charities in the United Kingdom. It would be a pity to abnegate, unilaterally, such an important relief as zero rating, particularly because, as I understand it, once removed, it cannot be restored other than by a new agreement of the Council of Ministers.

The impact of VAT on domestic fuel and power will be significant on charities whose object are to help the poor, the sick and the disabled. As has already been mentioned, in 1992 the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund gave £800,000 in grants for fuel. Sense, the National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association, estimates that the extension of VAT will increase its costs of running residential homes and centres by £32,000. Methodist Homes for the Aged, which runs Cedar Lawn in my constituency, reckons that the overall cost to the charity of the 17·5 per cent. VAT will be £143,000 in a full year.

The Home Farm Trust—which is also important in my constituency: it runs homes in Cherington and Bidford—calculates that its costs of VAT on fuel and power will be £60,000, which will mean an increase of £2·30 in its weekly charges. It has made the important point that that increase will have to flow straight back in charges to local authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) said, the Abbeyfield Society has calculated that the VAT extension will cost it no less than an extra £500,000.

The Government are looking to such charities to play an increasingly important role in the delivery of their social policy. It is timely, with the introduction of care in the community, to review the VAT regime for charities. I understand, of course, that the present fiscal constraints on the Government may make it difficult to make a substantial, immediate concession. I believe, however, that my right hon. Friends should pause before requiring charities to pay additional VAT on fuel and power.

As I have already suggested, charities are being brought more formally and extensively into the panoply of social provision. They are being asked by the Government to provide residential homes, day centres, respite care and many other services. They are being asked to demonstrate their cost-effectiveness, to tender alongside commercial organisations and to compete in effectiveness with local authority providers.

Commercial organisations and local authorities, however, are able to recover VAT, whereas charities cannot recover it on the greater part of their spending. That irrecoverable VAT is already costing charities about £300 million a year. The extension of VAT to domestic fuel and power will place charities at a further disadvantage. In the interests of policy coherence and of achieving fair competition in that particular market, the Government should reconsider.

The net benefit to public funds of requiring charities to pay VAT on domestic fuel and power would, in any event, be small. The Government estimate, that when the system is fully operational, charities may pay £25 million a year. It is quite reasonable to suppose that some three quarters of that money would come back in the cost of contracts to local government. Moreover, if charities have to pay the additional VAT, they will be less able to pursue their role when it is not contractual, but complementary to that of local and central Government in the relief of poverty. Apart from the humanitarian consideration, in the end that would save the Government money, too.

I hope therefore that my right hon. Friends will extend compensation to charities that are helping those in need, whether through grants or the provision of services. I also hope that my right hon. Friends at the Treasury and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will listen carefully to what charities are well placed to tell them about the detailed impact of VAT on fuel and power among vulnerable people.

It is clear that income-related benefits will not be a sufficient means of compensation. We must also look to the needs of the long-term sick and disabled who receive non-means-tested benefit, such as invalidity benefit, and

are just above the income support level. Many disabled people do, unavoidably, incur additional costs due to their disability.

People with limited mobility or poor circulation do not maintain their body temperature as well as the rest of us, and have to spend more on heating. The disabled have a range of needs which mean that they use more energy at home. Incontinent people have to pay for the cost of extra laundry; people with special diets have to use electric blenders; severely disabled people need lifts, which are expensive in energy terms, but crucial to independent living. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has found that 51 per cent. of disabled people spend more on fuel and power than they would if they were not disabled, while Department of Social Security research has concluded that disabled people spend an average of £1·44 per week more than the rest of us.

When I asked my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury a question on 4 March about VAT and charities, he said:

"The Government always listen sympathetically on such matters."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 447.]

I believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends will listen sympathetically today and during the passage of the legislation and, again, in the autumn. If they find themselves unable to exempt charities from VAT on their non-business activities altogether, I hope that they will at least pause before imposing an additional VAT burden on charities.

If they conclude that it is impossible to relieve charities of VAT, either because of the administrative complexity or for the reason suggested by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary earlier—because they are loth to provide a tax concession that would benefit Eton college at the same time as Help the Aged—I hope that they will look for a remedy along the lines of other European countries and offer grant in aid. That would enable the Government to target charities whose business is to help those in need.

In the meantime, I hope that amendment No. 5 is not pressed to a Division. I believe that it will be possible to find common ground on the subject. I am confident that my right hon. Friends will wish to think further on the problem.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Conservative speakers have today made much of the public sector borrowing requirement, but have omitted to say who ran it up, why they did so and how different methods can be used to reduce it. Some Conservative Members also discovered the usefulness of seeming green. They forget that the Secretary of State for the Environment did not even mention VAT on fuel as a green option in his recent consultation paper on climate change.

The demand for heating is notoriously inelastic. If anyone cuts back on heating, it will be those on low incomes. Those people should be at the heart of our debate as it is they who face the cruel choice between becoming colder or cutting other essential items. I say "colder" as there is already overwhelming evidence that large numbers of people cannot afford to keep warm.

Two recent Scottish studies show that 70 per cent. of respondents in deprived areas said that their houses were too cold. The report "Cold Comfort" from Age Concern focuses on the elderly and contains many revealing and alarming facts. I urge all Conservative Members to read it. It says that the morning room temperatures of 81 per cent. of elderly people are below the guidelines of the World Health Organisation and that the main reason for low temperatures is lack of money. It states that two thirds of those asked in the survey would spend any extra money that they received from pensions or other sources on heating. It also states that 30,000 to 40,000 more people die in this country in the winter than in other European countries and that there are more than twice as many cold-related diseases in this country than in any other European country. It found that a staggering 750,000 elderly people were at risk of hypothermia in the winter months.

8.45 pm

How dare the Government put those already at risk even more at risk? Those people need help with their heating, not the opposite. Today we should be discussing the means by which pensioners and other low-income groups should receive such help. The Government like us to believe that no one on a low income will be worse off as a result of the measure. Earlier, we saw the Chief Secretary weaving and evading the subject.

It is clear that there will not be full compensation, even for those on income-related benefits. There are thousands of poor people who are not on income-related benefits; for example, 700,000 pensioners—one in three—who could claim income support do not do so. About 2·35 million pensioners get between 1 and 39 per cent. above income support levels. We are talking about at least 3 million poor pensioners who will receive no help.

The measure will affect not just pensioners, but millions of other people on low incomes. A recent report of the Policy Studies Institute called "Credit and Debt" revealed that, of those earning £100 a week, 5 per cent. had problems with electricity debts and 6·4 per cent. with gas debts. The percentages of unemployed people with similar problems were even higher. One young mother came to my surgery only two or three weeks ago and said that, although she was on a low income, she had to spend £25 a week on electricity because her house was appallingly damp. She is not alone—a recent survey on the condition of Scottish homes revealed that 423,000 houses in Scotland suffered from damp, serious condensation or mould. A recent Shelter report revealed that 120,000 children in Scotland faced severe health problems because of living in damp homes.

What right has the Conservative party to tell people living in such homes to reduce their heating in the interests of our planet or to spend more on heating in the interests of the Exchequer? If the Government cared about those people or were even faintly green, they would spearhead a massive home insulation drive, which is what Edinburgh district council is trying to implement through policies of insulation, window replacement and central heating for elderly people.

Edinburgh district council was promised £30 million in its capital allocation for housing, but because the Government got their sums wrong—they said that £15 million had to come from council house sales, when the figure was only £10 million—Edinburgh district council has a shortfall of £5 million. Therefore, it cannot pursue its desired policies on home insulation—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is saying that that is not relevant, I must tell him that it is extremely

relevant. If the Government claim to be green, they should be implementing such policies, not producing spurious green measures such as those proposed in the Budget.

As well as claiming that the proposals are green, the Government claim that they will help the public sector borrowing requirement. There are PSBR problems, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) asked: who caused the problems in the first place? If the Government were more confident of the prospects for the economy, they could afford to be more relaxed about the PSBR. The fundamental solution to the problem is to gain economic growth, followed by a policy of progressive taxation and possibly taxes on luxury items. VAT on heating is the most regressive taxation imaginable. As York university's social policy research unit report, issued over the weekend, said, the top fifth of income earners spend an average of £13 a week on heating and the bottom fifth spend £11. The difference is small and the figure is a high percentage of a single pensioner's income.

VAT on heating is almost a second poll tax and will do as little good for the Conservative party as the poll tax. The result will be more poverty and more ill health, with all the public expenditure implications inherent in that—or, more probably, a combination of the two. It is a totally unacceptable, but typical, Government measure. It punishes the poor for the mistakes made by the Government and should be thrown out tonight.

Mrs. Browning: I shall not detain the Committee long as I was fortunate enough to make a long speech on Second Reading and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary accepted an intervention from me this afternoon. However, I must put on record in Committee my continuing concern that pensioners, the disabled, the frail, the elderly and people of whatever age who very much rely on heating should be granted proper compensation in the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security in the autumn.

I have had discussions with my right hon. Friend on the subject and I understand the need to raise through taxation sufficient money to reduce the PSBR. I would say to Opposition Members, although no Liberal Members are present, that had the Government addressed the PSBR in the Budget, the cries from the Opposition Benches would have been accusing the Government of irresponsibility and profligacy and all the other arguments that would have been levelled at us.

It is a matter of on-going concern. Perhaps one of the disadvantages of announcing a tax a year in advance and, for the 17·5 per cent. rate, two years in advance, is that it gives Opposition Members a chance to make hay with the policy. On the plus side, it gives my right hon. Friends the opportunity to listen carefully to the concerns of Conservative Members.

I am sure that those who depend on income-related benefits will have proper compensation, but I reiterate my concern, particularly for pensioners who are just above the level at which they could claim income-related benefits. One would not classify them as wealthy; as hon. Members have said, they have been frugal during their working lives and they may have small occupational pensions and some money in the building society. While the fall in interest rates is welcome in the business sector and from the point of view of mortgage payers, people on fixed incomes rely on the interest from building societies on their life savings.

I urge my right hon. Friends to spend the months between now and the announcement in the autumn listening carefully, particularly to what Conservative Members are saying about that group of people.

I also ask my right hon. Friend to address a technical point. I am not sure whether I have interpreted it correctly, but I should be grateful if he would address it tonight. We have been assured that when the announcements are made in the autumn, the increases will come into effect in April before VAT is levied on fuel bills. I am aware that VAT involves a tax point in that VAT becomes payable from the date of the bill.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that people who have their electricity or gas meters read in the last two weeks of March and who receive a bill during the first two weeks of April, when VAT becomes applicable, will not have to pay VAT on bills which are received in the VAT period but relate to fuel consumption in the previous three months? I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could provide some clarification as I have received one or two letters on that specific point.

I shall not detain the Committee any longer, as other hon. Members wish to speak, except to say that I hope that my right hon. Friend has listened to my intervention earlier in the debate and to the representations made particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who represents a neighbouring constituency in Devon.

Devon has a high retirement population. We are pleased when people from other constituencies decide to retire there, but we are only too well aware that it is not a wealthy part of the country. We have high water charges and the prospect of high fuel bills in addition is causing great concern to my constituents.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Opposition Members have rightly drawn attention to the inequities of the Government's proposals in clause 42 to impose VAT on domestic fuel and power. To their credit, some Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), have also drawn the Government's attention to their unease about the proposals.

In stark contrast to Opposition Members, Conservative Members have been divided into those who wish to delude themselves that the Government have not broken their election promises by bringing clause 42 to the House, which of course they have, and others, such as the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who have made it clear that they have no intention of supporting the Government in the Division Lobby tonight.

I speak for many of my hon. Friends when I say that it has not been an edifying spectacle to see Government Back Benchers in such complete disarray. I suspect that those on the bottom line tonight, as in other debates, is that the Government Front Bench are dragging Back Benchers by the nose through the Division Lobby, and I hope that some Conservative Members will do what they have said tonight and withhold their support from the Government.

In addition to exposing the inequities behind clause 42 and its impact on those struggling to make ends meet on income support, my hon. Friends have also drawn

attention to the bogus environmental and green arguments that the Government have used in a tawdry attempt to justify clause 42.

Later in my speech I shall say something about the environmental case for clause 42, if there is one. However, I remind Conservative Members who might be considering supporting the Government tonight to look carefully at the timing that the Government propose for the implementation of clause 42 and draw their attention to how close that would be to the likely date of the next general election. If there is one thing that should be tattooed across the forehead of every Conservative Member it is the poll tax and how its prominence in the run-up to the last general election caused the Government considerable discomfort. I suspect that the same will happen over the implementation of clause 42.

Some of my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), drew attention to the Government's PSBR problems and the fact that clause 42 owes its origins not to any green concern stemming from Rio but to the Government's desire to balance the books, which are seriously out of kilter. In that context, we need to be clear that the imposition of VAT will be extremely regressive and will hit those on low incomes particularly badly. Some of my hon. Friends have already drawn attention to the precise implications of clause 42 on those on income support. Those with incomes of more than £800 a week spend only 3 per cent. of their weekly expenditure on fuel and power, whereas those on incomes of below £60 a week spend 13 per cent.—the impact on those on low incomes is nearly four and a half times greater. That is disgraceful.

In my constituency, more than 10,000 men and women currently claim income support, and of those more than 3,000 people draw the state retirement pension. Crude arithmetic would lead me to conclude that if we assume that, at the lowest point, clause 42 would increase weekly fuel bills by £1·50, we are talking about between £750,000 and £1 million being withdrawn from the local economy. That is in addition to the acute economic difficulties stemming from the severe redundancies at Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering in the past two years. Those considerable sums of money will have a regressive deflationary impact on the local economy of Barrow and Furness. It is disgraceful that those on desperately low incomes are being forced to pay the price of the Government's gross economic incompetence, yet that is precisely what clause 42 envisages.

It has also been clear from today's debate, particularly from the comments by the Chief Secretary, that the Government propose no specific measures to ease the impact of this dramatic hike in fuel bills which most of our constituents will be required to pay. The Government's promise that RPI indexation will reflect increases in fuel bills is clearly untruthful. There is no way such indexation will compensate those on low incomes for the extra £1·50 or £2 a week that they will be asked to pay once the clause reaches the statute book. We are talking about an attempt to balance the books, which are in their current disastrous state because of the Government's incompetence.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) has said, there is a long list of precedents for this move—whenever the Government are in economic difficulties, it is always those on low incomes who are asked to fork out the necessary funds.

9 pm

As for the environmental arguments for the clause, it is worth bringing to the Committee's attention the Department of Trade and Industry's assessment of the likely increase in fuel prices. It is estimated, for instance, that carbon dioxide emissions are projected to remain constant, at about 22 million tonnes a year, until the year 2020, even taking into account the high prices that will go with additional VAT on fuel bills. That was the estimate given in the Department's energy paper No. 59, published in October 1992.

The Treasury's best assessment is a modest drop of 1·5 million tonnes in carbon dioxide by the year 2000 as a result of this measure. It is worth speculating about whether other measures, such as promoting home insulation and draught proofing, might have produced a faster, fairer way of reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

While we are on the subject of the Government's record of promoting energy and fuel efficiency—green measures—it is worth pointing out that the Government's green house programme, designed to assist local authorities with energy efficiency, was worth £45 million in 1992-93 but is due to be cut to only £5 million in the next fiscal year. That is the true measure of the Government's commitment to environmental measures.

It is clear to my hon. Friends and to me—and, I suspect, to Conservative Members—that the Government's case is bogus and tawdry. I am afraid that it is yet another naked attempt to punish those who are least able to defend themselves. That is why, tonight as on other occasions, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will resist the Government's proposals.

Dr. Marek: A succession of Conservative Members have this evening said, "I fully support the Government, but . . ." I suspect that many of them are rather new and do not understand how Ministers operate. The plain fact is that the Treasury wants the money, and it will get it if Back Benchers vote to get it. Treasury Ministers will make as few concessions as they think they can possibly get away with. That is why they have arranged matters so that no details are to be given out on whether charities will be compensated or on the rate of indexation—at any rate, not until the autumn statement some time in November. If Conservative Back Benchers want to believe Ministers—who say that they will look a little more carefully at the problem—it is obvious that they have not been here long, or, if they have, they have not been listening hard.

One of the problems is that Treasury Ministers do not live in the real world. Their houses are not draughty and do not cost much to keep warm. Those who work in the Treasury building giving advice to Ministers do not live in the real world either. They all live in London, in the south-east of England, where it is generally warmer than elsewhere. They therefore have no experience of paying a lot for electricity or gas; they lack the experience of many other citizens, especially those who live in the northern-most parts of the country.

Another Conservative fallacy, heard this evening, was based on the idea that it is difficult to unpick a Budget. I do not see why we cannot unpick this little bit of Tory political dogma and get rid of it. It is not due to come into effect until 1994, and not fully into effect until 1995, so there is plenty of time. The sob stories delivered by one or two Conservative Members simply will not wash.

On 27 March 1992, the Prime Minister said:

[Dr. Marek]

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT."

That was a few days before the election. People throughout the country—I know this because I have been campaigning in the local elections, as have many Labour Members—have asked whether the Government were lying when they said that, whether they were bare-faced liars. I believe that there is no other explanation. They were either bare-faced liars or they were incompetent.

I suspect that the Government wanted to win the election, and they were worried because the opinion polls showed that the Labour party was ahead. Anything would do, and did, so long as the hon. Gentlemen sitting on the Conservative Benches by fraud tonight were enabled to win that election. It is clear that the country has recognised what they were up to; it has rumbled them as cheats and liars. It will not forgive them easily.

The Government have lied about value added tax, national insurance contributions and mortgage tax relief. Worse than that, they are now introducing a measure that cannot be removed by a succeeding Labour Government and that will hurt the worst-off in society most and the best-off least. Even worse, they are putting VAT on standing charges.

Standing charges are not very much to us as Members of Parliament with the salaries that we get. I can manage to pay standing charges; Conservative Members can manage to pay standing charges. Treasury Ministers—they do not live in the real world; they all live in London and the south-east—can afford to pay standing charges. I know that thousands of my constituents find it difficult to pay standing charges.

My hon. Friends have admirably made the case—I will not repeat it because time is getting short—that many people dare not spend a lot of money on electricity. They would rather go cold and hungry, because they do not want to fall into energy debt by spending too much on heating. They save on their heating, but they have to spend money on standing charges. Now the Government, without any sign of remorse—they regret nothing, to translate a famous phrase—are prepared to put VAT on standing charges.

I agree that the public sector borrowing requirement is in a mess. It is in a mess because the Government do not have, and never have had, an economic policy. They were forced out of the exchange rate mechanism, which they went into at too high a level. */Interruption./* I do not know what the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) is saying, but if it is that the Opposition did not criticise it at the time, that is true. That was for the very good reason that we did not want to run the country down.

Conservative Members may laugh, but I always thought that DM2·95 was far too high a rate. However, Mr. Morris, you will not find in *Hansard* one statement in which I said that it was too high, although I believed it. I did not say it, because I believed that it was our duty to pull together to see if we could get the economy right. We could not do it, and the Government found out at the end of the day that DM2·95 was too high. They had no economic policy then; they have no economic policy now.

The Government have run up a PSBR. They have a balance of payments problem of about £14 billion a year in the middle of a recession. Taxation, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is near the 40 per cent. mark—7 or 8 per cent. higher than when Labour was last in office, in the 1970s. We are much more highly taxed than we were before.

In spite of all that, the Chief Secretary says that the Government need to do something about the PSBR of more than £50 billion projected for this year and have decided to hit the poorest in society by putting VAT on electricity and gas bills. I want to know why they do not increase the highest rate of income tax from 40 per cent. to the higher levels seen elsewhere in Europe. The Committee will remember that, in the Budget for the year 1988-89, the 60 per cent. top rate of income tax was reduced to 40 per cent.

Why do not the Government think first about taxing those who can pay? For example, in *The Guardian* today, an article headed "30 per cent. rise for Asda chief" states:

"The chairman of Asda Property Holdings took a pay increase of almost 30 per cent. last year. The company's annual report shows that Emanual Davidson received £232,000 against £179,000 in 1991."

An increase in the top rate of tax on those incomes would go a certain way towards cutting back on the £50 billion PSBR.

That is not the only example. The papers are full of details of indecent rises in incomes. Last Friday, an article in the *Evening Standard*, headed "The TV millionaires", said:

"Bonanza payout will make moguls seriously rich men. Greg Dyke, the man who saved TV-am with Roland Rat, is set to collect a £5 million-plus jackpot for staying with London Weekend Television."

That article went on to mention another dozen people who would receive such payouts.

Why do not the Government tackle the problem and tax such people properly? They are the people who can pay. Old-age pensioners cannot afford to pay. We all know why. The Government do not care a fig about old-age pensioners. Back-Bench Tories complain consistently about the measure, but did any of them say that they would not support the Government? I have been in the Chamber for nearly all the debate, and so far only one Conservative Member—all credit to him—has said that he will not support the Government.

The Government have got it all wrong. I can see my Deputy Chief Whip glaring at me, so I had better finish what I am saying. However, I have a warning for the Government. This measure is like the poll tax. It will not come into operation until 1994 and even then it will only be at half cock. It will come fully into operation in 1995. If the Tories have any sense, those on the Front Bench will have organised a dozen Back Benchers to vote against the measure, to make sure that it never reaches the statute book. They would then be able to wring their hands in horror, but they would have saved the Tory party from ignominious defeat at the next general election.

This is like a running poll tax and when it comes into operation, in 1994-95, the Conservative party may be thinking of another general election. That is great for the Labour party, but I am speaking for the country and, for the country, I want the measure to be defeated. If any Tory Members have any guts, it will be defeated.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): The formal wording of the Finance Bill—that domestic fuel "shall cease to be zero-rated for the purposes of charging value added tax on any supply, acquisition or importation"—belies the very practical effect that the measure will have on those whom it will hit the hardest. Hon. Members on both

sides of the House, but particularly Labour Members, have spoken eloquently about the effect that it will have on their constituents. My postbag bears witness to the many representations that I have received from constituents in Hornsey and Wood Green, particularly pensioners, who do not know how they will afford the extra fuel costs, and who anticipate having to choose between heating their homes or paying for other necessities such as food.

It is axiomatic that an increase in fuel costs will result in colder homes for poorer families, who spend more of their budgets on fuel than others. Other hon. Members have quoted the estimate of the Institute for Fiscal Studies that families in the poorest 10 per cent. of the population spend 13·25 per cent. of their budgets on fuel, compared to those in the richest decile, who spend only 3·46 per cent. of their budgets on fuel. In the face of those figures, the Government's vague promises of compensation for poorer families are meaningless.

Mr. Nigel Evans: (Ribble Valley) What advice did the hon. Lady give the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Labour was last in power? Electricity prices rose by 30 per cent., but no assistance was given to the less well-off.

9.15 pm

Mrs. Roché: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Chamber: I am glad that he has taken the time to visit us. However, I should be rather more interested to learn what he put in his election address to his constituents.

According to Winter Action on Cold Homes, only 13 per cent. of the 7 million households who rely on social security benefits for most of their income have energy-efficient homes. Nearly 50 per cent. have no central heating, fewer than 50 per cent. have any draught proofing and only one third have adequate loft insulation. Young people will constitute one of the prime targets of the legislation. All the medical evidence suggests that cold rooms—especially cold bedrooms—increase the risk of lower respiratory tract illness in children; and, as we all know now, that is particularly dangerous during the first year of a child's life.

As Margaret and Arthur Wynn say in their book "Prevention of Handicap and the Health of Women",

"Every year infant mortality in Britain goes down in the summer and up in the winter . . . Britain suffers from what has been described as a winter massacre of the innocents . . . If a baby's body temperature is lowered resistance to disease is reduced. Lowered body temperature, or hypothermia, is a major cause of infant death particularly of low birthweight babies during their first days or weeks of life."

What if there is a massacre of the innocents now? Every year, more children die in the winter; 200 more infants under one-year-old died during the winter quarter of 1991 than during the summer quarter of the same year. In those circumstances, where will the poorest families in our country find themselves? The only way in which they will be able to reduce their budgets will be to turn off the heating.

Although there has been a significant decrease in the number of gas and electricity disconnections over the past few years, that trend has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of pre-payment meters, which allow customers effectively to disconnect themselves if they are short of money. That has been confirmed by a recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which found that indebted families were

"having to reduce their fuel comsumption . . . in order to buy other essentials or to avoid further debt."

How much harder and starker will be the choice presented to families if this measure is passed?

It is not inevitable that more children will die in winter. In Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, there is now no seasonal swing in the number of infant deaths, despite the more severe and longer-lasting winters. All the evidence shows that what happens in the first year of life is important, affecting respiratory and other diseases in later years. Any visit to a local hospital will show that treatment of such illnesses in middle and old age places a grave burden on our national health service.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer did the country a great disservice in proposing this measure. I hope that if Conservative Members do not have their consciences to guide them, they will at least be guided by Thursday's ballot boxes and vote against the Government's proposals.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I never thought that we would see the day when, once again, the Government would put the boot into our elderly people.

Does the Minister know the cost of a bag of coal, a gallon of paraffin or a bottle of Calor gas? I do, because I have lived in such circumstances, and my constituents still do. It is abysmal for the Government to propose a 17·5 per cent. VAT rate on fuel: they do not know what our people are suffering. Unemployment is at 3 million, and more than 9 million elderly, sick and disabled people have had their incomes savagely reduced by a pitiless Government. We have suffered for 14 years under a cold-hearted and cruel Government. This provision will cause great harm to the elderly. The Government are inflicting euthanasia upon them. That is how the Government intend to cut the bills: kill the elderly behind their front doors by making sure that they cannot afford to heat and eat.

For 14 years, the Government have mismanaged the economy. They have plundered our resources and sold the family silver. Now they expect elderly people to burn their furniture to give them a bit of heat. That is the level to which the Government have sunk.

I have worked with charitable organisations for years and years. The Government are putting more and more pressure on voluntary organisations to do what the Government ought to do: look after the elderly and the disabled and ensure that the unemployed can afford to heat and eat. Conservative Members ought to put an end to this savage, retrograde step by voting with us in the Lobby. I hope that Tory Members will have the guts to come into the Lobby with us and stop this imposition of 17·5 per cent. VAT on fuel and power now. I hope that they will show that they care for our elderly people.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): There spoke the authentic voice of the British people. *[Laughter.]* There is no cause for Conservative Members to laugh at the hardship they are forcing on the British people through this provision, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) spoke from the heart, on behalf of the people he represents.

We have heard argument after argument against the imposition of VAT on fuel and power. Hon. Members know that it is cynical, that it is a betrayal of promises to the electorate, that it is unfair and that it is especially damaging to the most vulnerable. Most powerful in their persuasiveness have been the speeches of my hon. Friends who spelt out how VAT on fuel and power will hit the

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

poorest, the elderly, charities and families on average incomes who are worried about their living costs. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said that it will hit people with disabilities.

We have also heard persuasive arguments for voting against VAT on fuel and power from Conservative Members, led by the courageous speech of the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). Remember what he said about the Chancellor's Budget imposition of VAT on fuel and power. He said that it was a very serious error of judgment. How right he was.

Concern was also expressed by the hon. Members for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Bristol North-West (Mr. Stern) for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who said that it would cause huge distress. Those hon. Members who are sitting on the Bench behind the Treasury Bench know, too, that this provision is not right because, day in, day out, the electorate have told them that it is not right.

Another persuasive argument against the imposition of VAT relates to the difficulties that the Government have had in cajoling enough people to speak in the debate—it is significant that they ran out of speakers before the allotted time—and the feebleness of the arguments of those who spoke in favour of this provision.

Only one Conservative Member spoke unequivocally in favour of it—the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan). I hope that he will be suitably rewarded by the Government and that he will be given responsibility in his future career for implementing this provision, of which he is so much in favour. No other Conservative Member was unequivocally in favour of it, because, like the proverbial turkeys, it must be bad enough being expected to vote for Christmas without being asked to sharpen the knife as well. That is what the Conservative Members who spoke in favour of this provision were being asked to do.

It must also be difficult for those who sit on the Treasury Bench. They know that their colleagues behind them grow more impatient by the hour for a Government reshuffle. They must be on the horns of a dilemma. It must be difficult for them to decide whether preferment will follow loyal defence of a provision that they know to be politically disastrous or whether it would be preferable to paddle some distance away from the Chancellor, lest he drag them down as well.

I listened to the Chief Secretary with care for any sign that he had taken the "bloody nose" message from the electorate or even from the Prime Minister. His eye-rolling ebullience makes him a less than plausible candidate for a role as someone who is listening to anybody, least of all the electorate. His inability to listen and learn was confirmed, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) said, by his speech, in which he trotted out the stock advocacy of this punitive proposal to extend VAT.

The Government claim that the proposal is necessary for the country because it will bring in lots of money—never mind the people who will have to pay it—and will benefit the environment because it will cut consumption and therefore will not bring in quite so much extra money after all.

The Chief Secretary argues that the proposal does not break Government promises because, when they said in the general election:

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT",

they meant it, but now they have the alibi that they have made a bigger mess of the economy and public finances than even they anticipated, so that is all right now, isn't it? That was the gist of the Chief Secretary's argument.

How shabbily that stood in comparison with the courageous words of the hon. Member for Corby, who had the integrity to say that he would keep his election promises by voting against extending VAT to fuel.

The message of last Thursday from people up and down the country as well as in Newbury was that, contrary to what the Chief Secretary claimed, the proposal is not all right at all—it is all wrong.

The Chief Secretary failed to understand, as the Government fail to understand, that the electorate were driven to bloody-nosed fury last Thursday not only by the VAT proposals, although they are bad enough, but by the shameless arrogance with which, time and again, the Government break promises, shift direction and always shuffle responsibility off on to somebody else, and never apologise or accept the blame for anything. They treat the British people with utter contempt, and the message of Newbury and of the county council elections is that people have had enough and want the Conservatives out.

People are not fooled into believing that the Government are doing all this for the sake of the environment. My hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Mr. Barron) and for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) did a comprehensive demolition job on that claim. People know that, if the Government were interested in conserving energy, they would, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said, spend money on insulating pensioners' homes rather than inflating their fuel bills.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): In its policy document "Looking to the Future", Labour states that a future Labour Government would use the taxation system to protect the environment. What taxes would the hon. Gentleman introduce to protect the environment?

Mr. Smith: We favour, for example, incentives to industry to act in the environmentally responsible way. We would not load a burden on the poorest, the elderly and the most disabled people in this country and claim that it had something to do with the environment when really it is just a means of closing the hole in the public sector finances, for which the Government, because of their economic failures, are responsible.

If the Government really cared about the environment, they would take practical measures to generate jobs, as well as save energy. Labour's proposed home energy efficiency scheme would reduce carbon dioxide by three times as much as the Government claim it will be reduced by the imposition of VAT on fuel.

If the purpose of the proposal really was to reduce energy consumption, the Government would not be extending VAT to standing charges, to rental charges for meters or to charges for connections, none of which has anything to do with consumption. The Government's policy has nothing to do with saving energy and everything to do with the desperate drive for money to narrow the yawning deficit in Government finances—the excess debt

to which my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) referred—and they do not care who they hit in the process.

Many hon. Members have referred to the effects on charities. The Charities Tax Reform Group, representing more than 300 charities, has stated the position with stark clarity. In a letter to me on 18 March, Adrian Randall, the chairman of the group, said:

"The imposition of VAT on fuel and power will cost CTRG'S members £27 million per annum and charities which provide residential care for elderly or disabled people will be hit the hardest. Unlike ordinary households, these charities are unable to reduce their heating in order to compensate for the increase in fuel prices . . . Charities again find themselves in a uniquely disadvantaged position because unlike local authorities and commercial organisations, they are unable to recover VAT."

The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir. J. Hannam) made similar points.

9.30 pm

The Conservative party is fond of proclaiming its support for charities and their important work. This evening provides the opportunity for Conservative Members to demonstrate that support in the only way that really matters here—by voting for amendment No. 5, which would exempt charities from the charge. After all, when farmers were disadvantaged by the VAT regime, the Government introduced the flat rate VAT scheme which enabled farmers to make a claim against their input VAT. If the Government can make exceptions for farmers, they can do so for charities. If Conservative Members do not vote for amendment No. 5, they will simply confirm the belief that Conservatives stand only for vested interests.

Another important matter, which has received less attention in our debate, is the effect on small businesses, especially the smallest and newest businesses. The effect will be dire. On the basis of Department of Employment figures, more than 1 million businesses are below the VAT threshold. Many of those are run from home when starting off and do not pay VAT on their fuel at present if the supplies are less than 40 per cent. of the household total.

For such businesses, the VAT increase will bang up costs and will either be passed on to customers or will come straight out of profits. For many, it will mean the difference between staying afloat and joining the more than 1,200 a week who are going bankrupt under this Government. So much for the Conservatives as the friends of small business. Those businesses will have every reason to conclude that today's Tory party cares only for those who donate millions to Conservative party funds or those who bolster the personal incomes of ex-Cabinet Ministers on their boards.

What also worries the country is the danger that the misuse of VAT to bail out the Government's bad housekeeping will set a precedent for other extensions of VAT. After all, if the Conservatives could not be believed when they said at the general election that they would not increase or extend VAT, how can people believe them when they say that again now? They did not break only one promise when they introduced this proposal; they broke their whole credibility as a Government. People know, as they showed last Thursday, that they can never ever trust the Conservatives again.

In practice, the extension of VAT puts at risk the very principle of Britain's right to levy a zero rate of VAT on essentials. As the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and others pointed out, apart from the fact that, under the European Community VAT agreement, it would be impossible for Britain to restore fuel to zero rating, if the Government get their way tonight and surrender the present position, what sort of credibility could they have in the negotiations to keep the zero rate when it comes up for review at the end of 1996?

Through the unilateral abandonment of a key zero rate on essentials, Ministers are sending themselves naked into the negotiating chamber as regards the continuation of zero rating. This is a precedent that will be used against them. I know, not least from the extensive debates on Maastricht, that many Conservative Members genuinely care about the maintenance of zero rating. I can only say to them, "If you really want to keep it, join us in the Division Lobby tonight."

The worst thing of all is that VAT on gas, electricity, coal and central heating oil would hit hardest those on the lowest incomes. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyme (Mr. Sheldon) has explained to the House on many occasions, VAT in general is a potentially highly regressive tax. When it was introduced, a measure of progressivity was retained by the zero rating of food, children's clothing, fuel and other necessities.

If zero rating is abandoned, as the Government now propose, VAT will be made more regressive overall and more unfair to those on the lowest incomes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) pointed out, those are the very people who have seen the whole tax system skewed against them during 14 years of Conservative government, while the Nadirs of this world are pampered by the Government's organisation of their tax affairs. There can be no clearer demonstration that, when it comes to taxation, the Government operate one rule for the rich and a completely different rule for the majority of the country and for the poorest people of all.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Coventry, North-East pointed out to good effect, academic studies by the social policy unit at York have shown just how unfair the proposal is. Similarly, the department of applied economics at Cambridge has calculated that the average impact on the poorest tenth of the population will be no less than seven times greater in relation to income than it is on the richest tenth.

Talk of averages and statistics, damning though they are, comes nowhere near capturing the despair of the poorest families and pensioners who will be hit by the measure. My hon. Friends—and, I am sure, some Conservative Members—will be familiar with the pensioner who comes to their advice surgery clutching the lined piece of writing paper with meagre outgoings down one side and even more meagre income down the other, and who says, "What am I to do? I cannot make ends meet. I cannot afford to feed myself properly."

Those are people whose days are spent worrying about how to pay for their heating and how on earth to pay their water rates. They are people who can never afford to buy a new coat. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, they are people who find that the small increase in their pension never covers the increases in the costs they face.

We are talking about men and women who have worked, scrimped, saved and struggled all their lives for a future better than this. What do the Government do to them? They put up their heating bills—in a country where

winter deaths among the elderly already exceed deaths in the summer months by 40,000 a year, and where hundreds of pensioners' deaths are directly attributable to hypothermia.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said, there is also a massacre of the innocents, in the number of babies dying of the cold in this country. Against the background of the social conditions in Britain today for which the Government have been responsible, this measure is nothing short of obscene.

The Government say—we have heard it again today—that they will compensate poor people for the effect of the increases. No one believes that they will compensate them adequately or in full because, when challenged by Opposition Members, Ministers have repeatedly refused point blank to give any assurance that there will be full compensation.

So even the poorest, even the most elderly, even the most disabled, will not be compensated in full. But the Government say that they will give those people something. Does it not occur to Ministers that, if they expected the people to be persuaded, reassured even, by that, they should have spelt out at the Dispatch Box before asking us to vote on the measure precisely how the compensation is to work? Do they not understand that their intentions will not, and after all that they have done simply cannot, be taken on trust?

The debate tonight could not be more timely. Time and time again in the past few days, we have heard Cabinet Ministers repeat the Prime Minister's claim that somehow the Conservatives will now start listening to what the electorate has been telling them. All that I can say is that they will be judged by their actions, not their words. It is no good Back Benchers voicing all the anxiety in the world tonight unless they are in the Lobby to vote against the measures which they rightly protest are doing so much damage.

Conservative Members have the chance this evening in the Lobby to show how far they have heard and understood what the British people have been saying. They have the chance to show whether they will act on it. If the Government will not listen to us, they must surely listen to their own poor bloodied infantry, the ones who got the bloody noses on the doorsteps of the no longer Tory shires.

They must surely listen to Essex Conservative Councillor Kevin Blake, who was quoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe:

> "We went into the last election telling people not to vote Labour because they would put up taxes and what happens—the government put up Vat. We need a leadership which does what it says and we need it badly. Otherwise what happened last week will just be the start."

Of course it will just be the start. It will be the start of further political disaster and betrayal of the British people as the first instalment of the increase comes into effect next year, and the full double whammy of 17·5 per cent. comes in the year after.

Conservative Members know from their party members, their hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Corby exactly what is going on. They should remember his words in the debate this evening. He said:

> "I personally feel ashamed that my party could bring such a proposal as this to the House."

What a damning indictment from one of their own colleagues.

Conservative Members know, as we know, that the electorate reject this punitive imposition of VAT. The measure is desperately unfair, has nothing to do with the environment, and is a betrayal of Conservative general election promises. I invite Conservative Members to keep faith with those who elected them, and join us tonight in voting down this despicable measure.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): This has been an important and, indeed, a real debate. I shall do my best to respond to those who have taken the trouble to speak in the debate from my party as well as from other parties.

I say at the start, because it has not always been apparent from speeches by Opposition Members, that no one, either on the Government side of the House or on the Opposition side, likes increasing taxes. One of my most distinguished predecessors as Paymaster General, Edmund Burke, was quoted earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) as saying that to tax and to please is given to no man. His successor today certainly understands the force of that. Nobody likes the necessity—and it is a necessity—of raising more revenue. But it is a necessity, which we as the Government must face —*[Interruption.]* Labour Members can dismiss it if they like and can sail over it, but we must face up to it in the interests of sound finance.

As the Committee knows and as the Chancellor spelled out at the start, the clause has two purposes, to raise——

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I will not give way at this stage.

Mr. Graham: The right hon. Gentleman is scared.

9.45 pm

Sir John Cope: No, not of the hon. Gentleman.

As I was saying, it has two purposes—the raising of revenue and the reduction of the use of fuel. The clause helps us to achieve our objectives in both those areas.

Mr. Connarty *rose*——

Sir John Cope: No, I will not give way at the moment.

Anyone who wishes to oppose the clause—clearly, some do—must explain whether they disagree with the objectives; few have done that, although some have skated over it. If they agree with the objectives, they must say how else they would achieve them.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Sir John Cope: No, I will not give way just now.

Mr. William Powell *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I am about to refer to my hon. Friend's speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) recognised the dilemma and said that he would increase income tax. He is, of course, entitled to his opinion, but I must tell him that I do not agree with it. Nor does my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), and nor do the majority of my hon. Friends.

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. Friend understand that the issue in the debate is not whether taxes have to be raised—that is clear in the light of the PSBR requirement—but why the Government have chosen this

particular tax, instead of all the other options, as the most appropriate one? Frankly, a convincing answer has not been given to that question.

Sir John Cope: I was pointing out that my hon. Friend's alternative is income tax, and I do not agree with him, for the reasons to which I shall come.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I will not give way at this stage, because I want to make progress with my speech. I shall not do that if I keep giving way.

Mr. Dicks *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I shall come shortly to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks).

It is important that, in raising this revenue, we do so without damaging——

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Sir John Cope: No, I told the hon. Gentleman a moment ago that I would not give way.

It is important that we do so without damaging incentives, and that is why I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Corby. It is also important that we do it without damaging the prospects for recovery—that is, without damaging industry and industrial competitiveness. That is not only important to industry—and, of course, it is important to industry—and it is not only important to the Government's finances, which it clearly is. It is also important to people because it is about employment, recovery and jobs. That is why we had to choose a way of raising revenue which did not damage industry and industrial competitiveness. To have done otherwise would have given away all those objectives.

Mr. Dicks: My right hon. Friend keeps saying that the only alternative would have been to have put up taxes. I gave an alternative in my speech. I said remove the subsidy to the arts, which is worth about £600 million, and stop overseas aid, which is running at £1·6 billion. That works out to exactly the figure that my right hon. Friend is trying to save by this silly move.

Sir John Cope: We shall certainly have to restrain spending as well as raise taxes. I would not agree with the aspects of public expenditure to which my hon. Friend drew attention in his speech and in that intervention. It would be difficult to detect any party in the House that disagrees with the Rio objectives, which are part of the reason for the introduction of clause 42.

At the time of the Rio summit, the then Labour spokesman on the environment, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said:

"more could have been achieved and British Ministers could have played a more positive role, particularly in respect of global warming"—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1992; Vol. 210, c. 409.]

I must tell the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that that relates to greenhouse gases rather than the hole in the ozone layer.

The main Labour document, "Agenda for Change", published since the election, contains the claim:

"The Conservatives dragged their feet in every way they could at the Rio summit."

The Opposiuon wanted us to go further on Rio and yet they oppose the extension of VAT, which will help to achieve one of the Rio targets. They should face up to those targets and accept the measures that are necessary to achieve them, if that is what they want.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir John Cope: Not for the moment.

In February, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) told the House that Labour should consider increasing VAT on "environmentally unfriendly products". What on earth he meant by that, if not the type of measure that we have put before the House, I am not sure. The Liberal party is also keen on the Rio objectives.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Cope: Not at the moment. I shall come to the hon. Lady's speech later.

We are not suggesting that taxation should be the only weapon for the achievement of the Rio objectives. There are a range of such weapons, but, in common with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, we believe that taxation is one part of the right strategy. If we are to avoid damaging industrial competitiveness, we must look to the domestic sector to conserve energy. There is no doubt that that is why Friends of the Earth, among others, welcomed our decision. It recognised that that decision represents a valid, green objective.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Sir John Cope: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I must make more progress.

Hon. Members will be aware of the discussions in the European Community about the possibility of imposing a carbon/energy tax. The United Kingdom is not yet convinced that such a tax is either necessary or appropriate. I know that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) believes that we should agree only to a European tax—presumably he had the carbon/energy tax or some version of it in mind. A large part of the burden of that tax would fall on industry and, unless a great deal of care was taken, it would have an adverse effect on competitiveness, which is something we wish to avoid.

Mr. Andrew Smith: With all due respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I suspect that his hon. Friends, in common with mine, have heard all this before. If the Conservative party has listened to what the people said last Thursday, the Committee and the country want to know what has changed in terms of what the Government proposed in the Budget and what they are proposing today.

Sir John Cope: If the hon. Gentleman wants to hear more of what I have to say, he should not interrupt me with such a useless intervention.

We all understand that, when we introduce the tax, we must protect the most vulnerable. That was acknowledged by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget speech and, since, by me and umpteen colleagues. That commitment was given from the start and has been mentioned many times in the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Sir John Cope: No, I shall not give way as I am about to turn to a subject about which I have been asked: the way in which we are to protect the most vulnerable. My right

[Sir John Cope]

hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear in his Budget speech—and the point has been repeated and expanded since—that extra help will be given to those on income-related benefits, including poorer pensioners. That extra help will be provided before April 1994 when we come to the first stage of the tax.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*——

Mr. Stern *rose*——

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) did not speak in the debate, so I shall proceed with my remarks, and return to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) in a moment.

The help will be given to 8 million households on income support, family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Of course, we include in that list the cold weather payments.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Paymaster General accept that, on the Department of Social Security's own figures, in 1989, 25 per cent. of people entitled to income support did not take it up and 43 per cent. of people entitled to other benefits did not take them up? The critical factor is ensuring that—in the Government's own words—we target the people who most need it. My next question is of paramount importance: what action are the Government taking to ensure that the people on the margins of poverty can be given assistance to deal with higher fuel bills which include VAT on standing charges?

Sir John Cope: I shall return later to cold weather payments and standing charges. The hon. Lady is right to say that many pensioners and others who are entitled to benefits do not take them up. However, the vast majority of benefits are received by the people who require them. It is extremely important that all of us encourage people to take up the benefits to which they are entitled—otherwise, how can we help them? If we make benefits available but people do not take them up, with the best will in the world, it is difficult to help those people.

Mr. Stern *rose*——

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I shall not give way, as I have reached a point in my speech about which many hon. Members have expressed opinions and I wish to be precise and careful. I have been asked: what about pensioners whose income is just above the income support levels? The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) asked me about that. I wish to make several points, particularly to my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington, for Bristol, North-West and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

The increases in income support rates that we have promised from April 1994 will also knock on to housing benefit, council tax benefits and other benefits available to people who are on low incomes, but live above the income support level. Increased benefit rates will bring more people into entitlement to income-related benefits. That fact, in itself, increases the numbers involved and is part of the reason why I could refer to as many households as I did.

In addition, the normal annual increases in benefits will, as we made clear, reflect the impact of fuel bills on the retail prices index. Even those who are not involved with any of the income-related benefits will be affected by that part of the increase. Therefore, all pensioners will get RPI-related increases, and special help will also go, and earlier, to those on income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and so on. Altogether, 1·5 million pensioners who are above the income support level will be helped by those means and that is extremely important.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Sir John Cope: Of course it is true that we have to, and we will, work on those problems between now and when the benefit ratings are announced in the usual way in the autumn.

10 pm

Mr. Stern: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all his comments have been based on income levels and that he has said nothing about those people who are forced to live in houses that are hard to heat and who will have increased difficulties as a result of the measures, whatever their level of income?

Sir John Cope: As my hon. Friend said, the benefits are devoted to people. They are devoted to those who receive benefit now and in future and to whom the increases will be available. Perhaps my hon. Friend can suggest a method of helping people who do not collect the benefit to which they are entitled as that is very difficult. We shall pay extra benefit and extend it to a further 1·5 million pensioner households.

We shall continue to take account of those matters as we work towards the announcements on the benefit increases in the autumn.

I was also asked about charities.

Mr. Marlow: Many people support and understand the logic of taxing fuel consumption, but what about the standing charge, which is purely about making available to people an essential service?

Sir John Cope: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall deal with the standing charge. It has been suggested that we should not apply VAT to the standing charge, as that would somehow offer help to the most needy. Some of the least well-off gas consumers pay by token meters. Their standing charge is lower and their unit charge is higher. As a result, that suggestion would not help the most needy. They would benefit less than other consumers from zero-rated standing charges. In any case, it is difficult to see how one could divide up a fuel bill and avoid problems.

On charities, we believe that it is a better principle—as the Budget demonstrates—to give relief on what people give to charities rather than to give relief to charities on the basis of particular patterns of expenditure at home, overseas and on particular goods. However, we have given a large number of VAT reliefs, as hon. Members know, and we shall deal with gift aid and payroll giving improvements later in the Committee.

The hon. Member for Peckham urged the House to vote for amendment No. 5. Many charities run residential institutions which are businesses in VAT terms and currently benefit from the zero rating of fuel and power because they are domestic concerns and not because they

are charities. The hon. Lady should notice that residential homes of that character would not benefit from amendment No. 5.

Mr. Dickens: I have freely to confess that I am one of those wavering on my vote this evening. What will the Minister do about the great in-betweens—those who are considered too rich to receive any benefit yet who are too poor to pay ever-increasing costs?

Sir John Cope: I did my best to explain to my hon. Friend and to the Committee that, in arranging the benefits, which we must consider in the autumn, we are already committed to extending them to 1·5 million pensioners in addition to those getting income support. We will do that by means of the improvements in income support and by means of the council tax and other benefits, thereby extending the amount of benefits on offer. I am afraid that those who do not claim benefits or are not prepared to claim them are difficult to help. If my hon. Friend can think of a way of helping them, he will have to tell us about it, but he did not do so in the debate. It is extremely difficult to know how to arrive at a solution to this.

No one likes the necessity for this tax, but it is a necessity. We have to face up to the problems of increasing revenue and reducing energy use. The Liberals did not face up to that. They want a European tax: nothing else. The Labour party does not face up to it either: it has never faced up to the public sector borrowing requirement. Opposition Members have not even realised that their problem at the general election was their spending plans, from which they have not since resiled. That is why we said that they would need much higher taxes than we would. We were right. What is more, we were believed, because of Labour's spending plans.

We all know that our warnings would have been doubly fulfilled since the election, given the way in which the world and European economies have gone. The Conservatives stand above all for taking difficult decisions and protecting the weak from them. That is what we are doing tonight—the ladder and the safety net. Above all, Conservatives stand for sound finance. It is essential, and the clause will help to achieve it.

Ms Harman: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 5, in page 23, line 40, after 'shall', insert

'except for supplies for charity use'.—*[Mr. Andrew Smith.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 286, Noes 297.

Division No. 259] **[10.07 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael

Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. John Spellar.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl'ff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine

Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 295, Noes 285.

Division No. 260] **[10.23 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David

Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. John Spellar.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 42 ordered to stand part of the Bill.
Committee report progress.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*
To sit again tomorrow.

National Health Service

10.36 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I beg to move,

That the National Health Service (Determination of Districts) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 574), dated 9th March 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be revoked.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motions:

That the National Health Service (District Health Authorities) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 572), dated 9th March 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be revoked.

That the National Health Service (Determination of Regions) Amendment Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 571), dated 9th March 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be revoked.

We are about to debate orders that relate to the reorganisation of the English national health service. Frankly, the orders do not do justice to the reorganisation proposed by the Government. The Government are reorganising the NHS by stealth and by the back door. The Minister is the Lord Hanson of the national health service. Merger mania, takeovers, corporate raids on funds, asset-stripping, sackings of staff, profit-taking, commercialisation and privatisation are all contained not only in these orders, but in previous orders which have been passed by the House without parliamentary or public scrutiny.

In 1982, the Government introduced proposals for the reorganisation of district health authorities. They created 192 authorities—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The orders are tremendously important. It is impossible to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) is saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Would hon. Members leaving the Chamber please leave quietly? If any sub-committees are meeting, will they please meet outside.

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). It is the first time that I have been shouted down in the House before I have got two minutes into my speech. I shall try to provoke Conservative Members a little more as I get further into my speech.

In 1982, the Government reorganised the district health authorities of England, creating 192 on the basis that the previous 85 were too remote, too large, had no control locally of the delivery of service and showed no signs of being consistent with local democracy and local accountability. Yet 11 years on, the Government are by stealth reversing that policy and are reducing the number to between 85 and 90. With the reorganisation, they are removing much of the public accountability and public participation in local health services. Why is that?

Why is the Minister reorganising the national health service in this reorganisation that dares not speak its name? Why, with little local consultation and hardly any parliamentary scrutiny, are the Government undertaking the biggest reorganisation of the health service in England since 1982? It is all about the creation and development of a market in the national health service.

[Mr. McCartney]

At a time when the Government are causing bed closures, when there are nearly 1 million people on the waiting lists, when prescription charges are rising, when limited lists are being introduced, when student nurses are being made redundant and qualified nurses are being sacked, when GPs are saying that the community care proposals are a shambles and when charities both locally and nationally are paying for life-saving equipment because the national health service cannot afford it, the Under-Secretary is appointing Conservative after Conservative to chairmanships and non-executive positions on the boards.

The money that is being spent is an absolute scandal —a scandal of major proportions. Let me give the House some indication of the size of the gravy train that the Under-Secretary is driving. Take the hon. Gentleman's own constituency as an example. In Bolton, during 1990-91, £17,100 was available in remuneration for the chair and non-executive members. By 1992, that figure had risen to £49,356. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), who is trying to reduce income support for the unemployed, has presided over an increase from £35,000 to just under £50,000 in remuneration for Conservative appointees on the health authority in his constituency. The Government are introducing income support, using public funds, for Tory party members to run quangos in the national health service.

Some of my hon. Friends want to speak tonight about the situation in the north-east, which is even more devastating. For example, the Newcastle upon Tyne, expenditure in respect of chairmen and non-executive members has risen from £46,000 to £107,469. In Cumbria, the figure has risen from £15,000 to £48,000; in Gateshead, from £29,000 to £43,000; and in Northumberland, from £31,000 to £63,000.

One can cite area health authority after area health authority—and that at a time when the Government cannot find the money to pay student nurses finishing their courses and are giving them a certificate with one hand and a UB40 with the other. It is outrageous that the Government are spending these rare resources not on primary health care or care in the NHS but in payments to Tory party members to run the national health service.

The reorganisation involves centralisation; it is leading to services being planned by people who do not know their own populations and who do not live in their areas. The Minister is creating purchasing giants because he wants to ration care in the national health service. He wants to create offices of health regulation by replacing public health officers and appointing health commissioners, 50 per cent. of whom have no medical qualification whatever. He is replacing qualified medical staff with consultants and accountants whose responsibility is not to prepare and deliver a local health care service on the basis of need, but to ensure that purchasing is the main drive of health care in the regions. There will be no public accountability whatever. The new organisations are to be run exclusively by political appointees. After last Thursday's election debacle, the Government will have hundreds more ex-councillors to appoint to those positions.

Finally, I want to ask the Under-Secretary about London. He argues that we should have conterminosity —the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is surprised that I managed to pronounce that properly— and that the reorganisation is about trying to ensure that districts are amalgamated and that there is a commonality of boundaries with local authorities. Why is it then that, for Kingston, Esher, Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton, there is no conterminosity? The Government have broken it up. They have divided the new health authority between four or five district councils. I believe that the reason is that the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) has an interest in a particular hospital there. He is concerned——

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No, I will not give way.

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney obviously wants to ensure that the boundaries suit the Government politically rather than suit the national health service.

Mr. Taylor *rose*——

Mr. McCartney: I know that the hon. Gentleman comes from Esher, but he has an opportunity to put the case in the same way as I am trying to put the case. Perhaps for once he will speak in the House on health service matters and put the case.

The Government owe it to the House to explain why, in the areas that I have mentioned, they are getting rid of conterminosity and replacing it with politically biased boundaries irrespective of the health care needs of the borough.

It is absolutely essential that there is more public debate about the proposals. It is clear that the orders that the Government intend in the weeks and months ahead to propose further major reorganisation of district health authorities, uprooting local accountability, destroying the commonality of each community, removing local purchasing and replacing it with big takeovers and mergers. In some areas, local authorities will also lose the opportunity to co-ordinate community care in a rational way.

Local community health councils will be under threat from the Government when the Government remove the coterminosity of the boundaries as a result of the major changes and takeovers that are taking place. That has already led in many areas to the closure or partial closure of hospitals as big organisations drive down the cost of health care at the expense of services to the local community. I ask my colleagues not only to speak against the orders but to vote against them in the Lobby.

10.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). When he hits that top C sharp and holds it for 10 minutes it is a marvel of oratory and Conservative Members know that he is destroying whatever case he is trying to put to the House.

The debate gives me an opportunity to discuss with the House the merits of mergers of health authorities and the benefits that they give to patients and the health service. Most people know about the remarkable changes that have been made on the provider side of the health service.

Trusts are undoubtedly one of the great success stories of the health service and probably the greatest single radical change since its inception.

Rather less well known, and perhaps more important, is the new position and role of health authorities as purchasers. Purchasing is a new concept not entirely understood by Opposition Members, as we have just heard, but it is enormously important. In case the hon. Member for Makerfield has not noticed, health authorities will not manage hospitals in future; that will be the duty of trusts. Purchasers will have an entirely new role. They will assess the health needs of their area.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the Minister like to tell us whether this system went live on 1 April and whether, if that is so, almost all the authorities on his list are trying to implement illegal contracts?

Mr. Sackville: I do not recognise the constitutional validity of what the hon. Lady says. The Opposition are praying against orders to merge health authorities which became effective on 1 April.

The new merged health authorities will set standards for care in their areas. They will target the resources allocated to them by the regional health authorities. They will demand value for money through the contracts that they set with providers. Lastly, they will monitor quality. But they will also have a wider remit. They will also be the bodies that influence the health agenda in each area. The vision for that was set out in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper. Health authorities will be encouraged to form healthy alliances with other agencies, such as local authorities and voluntary organisations, and even with private sector companies to influence and improve the health of their populations.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): How can the new health authority in Redbridge and Waltham Forest, in my area, improve the health of the people there when it will suffer a £13·5 million cut over the coming five years? The first £2 million cut was implemented this year. That authority, local Members of Parliament and the local public have not been consulted. The Minister talks of a new role for those health authorities. Is this not another way of telling the public that they cannot get the treatment that they need?

Mr. Sackville: On the contrary: they will be in a position better to marshal the resources at their disposal, for reasons I shall explain. Health authorities now have a formidable brief, so we need to develop and strengthen NHS purchasers.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): There has been a terrible dispute between Redbridge health authority and the Redbridge health care trust in recent weeks, and only in recent days has the authority taken contracts to the trust. That has resulted in a massive problem financially, including a potential £400,000 deficit for the new trust. Is that some of the co-operation about which the Minister is talking?

Mr. Sackville: I have no doubt that in many areas there will be certain constructive tension between purchaser and provider, and that is an example of the contracting system. Indeed, it is one of the strengths of the system.

I shall not delay the House long because other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. What are the benefits of mergers? They will play an important part in helping larger health authorities to assess and meet the health care needs of the population in the way that they relate to other local bodies, particularly family health services authorities and local authorities.

A high proportion of district health authority mergers will help to simplify those relationships by, as the hon. Member for Makerfield rightly said, conterminosity, meaning common borders with other agencies. We do not pretend that they will guarantee success, and there will not be common borders in every case, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. Common boundaries can help with the integrated purchasing of primary and secondary care and with the task of commissioning care in the community.

Larger authorities will have a more stable population on which to assess the needs of their local populations and they will be better prepared for eventualities in those larger areas. They will be in a better position to place contracts for specialised services and special care groups.

Mergers can offer the prospect of increased purchaser leverage, giving district health authorities more bargaining power and clout in dealing with providers and getting a proper deal for their patients. DHAs must be strong enough to bring the benefits of GP fundholding—which is a whole new factor in the NHS—to all GPs, whether or not they are fund holders, and to their patients. They will enable purchasing authorities to make the best use of human resources. Purchasing will not require large numbers of people, but it will need a critical mass of highly skilled personnel if it is to be properly performed. In the past, DHAs have suffered from the migration of high-quality staff to trusts, but larger authorities will be better placed to attract and retain the best people to do the job.

Mergers will produce administrative savings and considerable economies of scale, which should be welcome to all hon. Members. By simply reducing the number of contracts, a considerable saving can be achieved. Of the mergers under discussion, that in South West Durham will reduce the number of contracts to be negotiated from 220 to 120. I know that one health authority in the west country has claimed, since merger, to have saved more than £1 million in administrative costs.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): How can the Minister argue that merging purchasing authorities saves administrative time and money and is valuable in terms of the patient, when the inevitable thrust of GP fundholding is to break up the purchasing arrangements, the larger contracts and the benefits that can be gained from rationalising and quality of scale, and replace them with small purchasing contracts?

Mr. Sackville: The virtues of GP fundholding are obvious. If the hon. Gentleman talks to fund holders and their patients, he will discover the benefits that they are receiving as a result of the change in their relationship with providers. There is no doubt that economies of scale will result from eliminating duplicated posts in health authorities that merge.

Patient benefits can be achieved by linking the planning and development of services with other agencies and by improving the quality of purchasing bodies in order to make them more responsive to local people. The greater pressure on costs will release resources for care. I should

[Mr. Sackville]

have thought that, given the new role of health authorities, which will not manage hospitals but will be purchasers, it would be clear that new configurations will be necessary.

I heard nothing of any substance in the speech of the hon. Member for Makerfield. He attacked the proposed changes and his speech was yet another gratuitous attack on the health reforms. It may be indelicate to talk about elections now, but before the general election we heard from the Opposition a litany of gratuitous attacks on the health service, which they sought to denigrate. If they continue with their Pavlovian response of persistent attacks on everything to do with the health reforms, it will be clear that the events of April 1992 have taught them nothing.

10.57 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): The Minister spoke at length about coterminosity and it is ironic that we should be debating health authority mergers, because this morning the Local Government Commission published its findings about the future of local government services in County Durham. I am delighted to tell the House that the commission recommended a unitary tier council for Darlington. That will restore control that was stripped from the town in 1974 by the then Conservative Government.

Nearly 20 years on, we are debating orders that will, once again, take power from Darlington, this time from its other key public service, the NHS. Just as social services and other services that might impact on health care are to be delivered back to the town, the NHS will be taken out of local hands. That decision is not only illogical but it will create a bureaucratic minefield where patients, once again, will be the casualties. That is only one of the many ironies and concerns that have been revealed by the impact and process of the merger of the Darlington and South-West Durham health authorities.

Together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), I have strenuously opposed the merger from the outset, because we believe it to be a false merger which will do nothing to improve health care in either Darlington or South-West Durham. Our resolve has been strengthened by each twist and turn in the lengthy merger process.

The merger to create the new South Durham health authority did not arrive on the scene from nowhere on 1 April, but had a lengthy gestation period. It was conceived in secret and delivered by a mixture of manipulation and deceit. Members of Parliament were even denied the chance to debate the merger before it came into being on 1 April—an issue which has already been raised by one of my hon. Friends.

The saga of South Durham health authority dates back to 25 April last year when the Northern region health authority published proposals for a new set of consortium arrangements to purchase health care. Seven consortium arrangements were to be created covering the 15 district health authorities in the north, including one for South Durham, covering the Darlington and South-West Durham health authority areas.

Early in March last year I received the first in what was to be a series of leaks from a well-placed source inside the region's NHS, which showed that the new consortiums were envisaged as staging posts to full-blown health authority mergers. My source was able to state which senior managers were to be moved into which posts in order to facilitate the merger. The leaked predictions were to be proved uncannily accurate. The game of management musical chairs involved Darlington's chief executive, Geoff Nichol, and South-West Durham's David Ryan disappearing off the scene to allow a newcomer, Tony Jameson, to take over as chief executive of the joint authorities.

When the story appeared in the local paper, *The Northern Echo*, a regional health authority spokesman went out of his way to dismiss the document as pure speculation. He said that the possibility of a merger had not even been discussed. I did not want to leave anything to chance and immediately wrote to the regional health authority chairman, Peter Carr—as a good prospective parliamentary candidate should. I received a clear reply from Mr. Carr on 26 March. He said:

"there is no regionwide blueprint. There is no timetable. Any new consortia management arrangements that are developed would remain accountable to the existing statutory health authorities."

By the end of the next month, Geoff Nichol and David Ryan had left their posts, but the region's head of communications, Dr. George Forster—a man who will frequently appear in the course of the saga—told the other local paper, the *Darlington and Stockton Times:*

"as for merger well it is just not on the agenda".

In the same newspaper on 23 May, the same Dr. Forster greeted the news that Tony Jameson had arrived in Darlington with a categorical assurance that

"the new appointment of Mr. Jameson is for the post of district general manager of Darlington. He is not being employed to run the joint purchasing function."

However, the following week, Dr. Forster had gone strangely quiet. Perhaps that was not surprising as, by that time, Mr. Jameson had been appointed as acting chief executive in South-West Durham as well. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I have the highest regard for Mr. Jameson, so when he said in a newspaper interview that "the regional health authority has a view that a smaller number of districts in the region is a desirable arrangement", naturally we all felt concerned.

Our concerns were heightened when, in the middle of July, *The Northern Echo* received a leaked copy of a memorandum written by Mr. Jameson. It informed senior managers and district health authority members that a proposed merger of Darlington and South-West Durham health authorities would be discussed at the regional health authority meeting on 28 July. All that happened before the two districts had had a chance to meet on 22 and 24 July to ask the region to back the merger proposal. Mr. Jameson's memo had blown the regional health authority's cover about there being no blueprint and no timetable.

It is little wonder that, by that time, the very idea of public consultation was dismissed as an elaborate sham. Ministers connived in a fait accompli to ensure that a merger was forced on Darlington and South-West Durham.

That view is enforced by an examination of the regional health authority's treatment of the responses that it received. I have no doubt that the Minister will say that a majority of the responses were in favour of the merger. However, he will omit to say that the overwhelming majority of the favourable responses came from NHS organisations. Such is the loyalty to the centre in the NHS nowadays that they could not be expected to rebel.

Even when dissent was expressed, it was discounted. The regional health authority managed to count a letter from a consultant paediatrician as expressing no comment in overall support or opposition, despite its clear view:

"I fail to see how the new larger authority will benefit the people . . . The people wish to keep their own services locally. Travelling for many is not easy. Transport is expensive."

Others were not consulted at all. Darlington MIND, an important local voluntary organisation providing services for the mentally ill, has never been consulted about the proposed merger and the 2,000 people who signed a petition organised by myself and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland were counted as one response.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

We are used to health Ministers manipulating the figures. I understand that they have their own interests to serve, but this is statistical jiggery-pokery on a grand scale.

In the headlong rush towards merger, local views have been trampled underfoot. No doubt the Minister has a defence for the merger and I can guess what it is. He will say that it makes financial sense and that there are administrative savings to be made. That is a bit rich coming from a Government who have managed to treble the number of managers and administrators in the NHS since the introduction of its market reforms. Even if that were true, Mr. Jameson, a notable local authority, said in *The Northern Echo* on 2 May that changes in administrative numbers will be achieved through redeployment; in other words, redeployment to the provider units. It is a question not of cutting bureaucracy but of moving bureaucrats around. The Minister knows that there will be no major savings.

The Minister will also say that those who oppose the merger are worrying unnecessarily because changes among purchasers have no impact on the services that the patients receive from providers, yet provider services are already being merged in Darlington, and South-West Durham. Chiropody and speech therapy are merged services. There will be community services opt out across the two districts and, most seriously, there is still a question mark hanging over the future of Bishop Auckland general hospital.

There is a strong feeling in South-West Durham that the Minister has in mind running down the general hospital to the level of a cottage hospital. That view has been prompted by the long delays in announcing the go-ahead for the phase 3 development, despite the prompting of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland.

The Minister has a chance to end the speculation tonight by giving the green light to that development. I hope that he will grasp the opportunity with both hands.

The result is simple. The new South Durham health authority is more remote and less accountable. It has only five non-executive directors, all appointed by the Tory Secretary of State, where there used to be 10. There will be only one joint consultative committee, so weakening links with the voluntary sector. There are doubts about the future of the two community health councils because the regional health authority document indicated that they were safe, but only for the time being.

I hope that the Minister is listening and that he will take the opportunity of giving a cast-iron guarantee that the future of the two CHCs is safe, regardless of anything else. His failure to do so will leave people in Darlington and South-West Durham with the clear impression that in the new model market NHS the views of local communities count for absolutely nothing.

The Government have clearly decided to let purchasers go the way of providers, so that takeovers and mergers become the order of the day. The new philosophy seems simple: biggest is best. The latest proposal to emerge from the regional health authority is not just for South Durham health authority or North Durham health authority but for a new purchasing consortium—where have I heard this before?—for the whole of County Durham. Twenty years on, we have gone full circle; we are back to the old area health authority structures which were discredited because they were remote, monolithic bureaucracies, out of touch with local people.

We have a more centralised, less accountable health service than ever before. It is also a more secretive organisation. Yet it would be as well for Ministers to remember that the NHS remains a public service. It belongs to the people. It is not the private property either of unelected bureaucrats or of Conservative Ministers, making decisions over the heads of local people.

The process of creating a merged South Durham health authority has been a shameful one. It has been undertaken by stealth. It has relied on misrepresentations, false denials and back-door deals. In a town where there is a proud tradition of public services being run locally, there is understandable and genuine anger about how the community in Darlington has been kept in the dark about the future of its NHS.

It is for those reasons that I ask the Minister not only to rescind the orders but to announce tonight an independent inquiry into the South Durham merger. The people of Darlington and South-West Durham deserve no less.

11.12 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I agree with one thing that the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) said. Like him, I strongly support community health councils. When the debate was held in north Yorkshire about whether the four district health authorities should merge into one purchasing authority, one of the chief concerns was what that would mean for the future of the community health councils. Both the York and Scarborough CHCs do an excellent job of feeding to officials in our hospitals the feelings of local people about their needs in relation to service provision.

It was only when the Secretary of State for Health made it clear that the community health councils were safe and were not to be merged along with the DHAs that support for the central purchasing authority in north Yorkshire came from the grass roots. I hope the Minister will acknowledge that point.

I invite the Minister to visit Malton. If he wants to see a fund-holding practice that works in conjunction with a small community hospital, he will see none better than in Malton. The last time I talked about Malton in a health debate someone interrupted to suggest that the hospital would close within six months. That was three or four years ago and the hospital has gone from strength to strength. During the recent local election the usual rumours about the future of the hospital were flying thick and fast. I have made strenuous inquiries and I cannot get a handle on any of these rumours—only a flat denial from the chief executive of the Scarborough health trust that it has any plans to cut services at Malton hospital.

Apart from seeing the wonderful fund-holding practice and how the hospital works, the Minister, I hope, will come to Malton to issue a warning to the health trust, just in case it is thinking of curtailing any services. It must think again. Although I fully support the merger of the four district health authorities in north Yorkshire—with the four hospitals now all health trusts, it makes a great deal of sense for north Yorkshire to constitute one purchasing authority—I have been anxious that that

should not lead to any diminution of funding for each of the trusts. Scarborough health trust is facing a shortfall of £1 million.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Surely not.

Mr. Greenway: Well, from my discussion with the chairman of the Yorkshire health authority and his officials, it seems to me that the money that once went to Scarborough is going to other health trusts and health districts in the Yorkshire region, most of which, I have to say, are represented by Opposition Members.

We accept that somebody has to make a strategic judgment about where the resources are needed, but if savings are to be found in the Scarborough health trust, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that the way to find the £1 million savings is by having a really forceful campaign against waste and bureaucracy within the NHS, not a campaign to curtail things like maternity service provision at Malton hospital.

I am glad that my hon. Friend nodded and I give him the good news that I read in my *Yorkshire Post* on the train this morning that that is precisely what the chief executive of the Scarborough health trust plans to do, to attack waste and bureaucracy. I put it to my hon. Friend and the House that he has a clear interest in ensuring that we attack bureaucracy, because he wants, as I and every hon. Member should want, to demonstrate that the Government's health reforms lead not to more bureaucrats, administrators and waste, but to more patients being treated. We have had more patients treated in north Yorkshire over the past 12 months under the Government's health reforms than any member of the Opposition thought possible.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) asked why we needed any kind of larger purchasers, and why not leave it to the GP fund holders. There is an obvious answer to that: we still require some authority to take a strategic view of the needs of each area.

My hon. Friend knows, representing as he does a seat in Lancashire, what a big county north Yorkshire is. Clearly, in some areas, there is scope for asking whether every district hospital needs to provide every medical facility. Do they all need an eye unit, for example, or a cardiothoracic unit, and so on? The answer, obviously, is no, but I ask him to bear in mind that north Yorkshire is a very large county. Travel is difficult. People have long distances to travel already to the district facilities. I hope that he and his officials will bear that in mind when considering the funding requirements of the county.

To sum up, if we are to launch this attack on waste and bureaucracy, we have to accept that we need more competent, professional people, capable of managing this huge national health service, with all the people that it employs. If by merging health authorities we can cut some of the waste, there can be no argument against agreeing that if we now have four health trusts working successfully in north Yorkshire, there should be one central purchasing authority, subject to the caveat that I have made about taking into account the size of our county. I hope that this will not lead to some changes which, in the long term, we might regret.

11.18 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): It is not very easy to talk about a reduction from some 200 health authorities to 90 in such a short space of time, so I will confine my remarks to a few general points.

With boundary commission changes imminent, why were not regional health authorities told to await the decisions on local authority borders? Would not it be more sensible, if we are to merge authorities, for them to be coterminous with local authorities, as the local authorities have now been given community care responsibilities? I cannot see how the Government can expect collaboration across services such as that called for in "Working for Patients", "Care in the Community" and "Health of the Nation", yet miss the opportunity to effect a change to assist that co-operation.

Then there is the sheer size of merged authorities. The Minister told us in the debate in January that one reason for the changes was that the purchaser would need to take advantage of bulk purchasing power. Did not the Government realise, when they dreamt up their reforms, what would be the logical outcome of the market? Purchasers would need to become bigger and bigger in the face of competition and more and more remote from the community.

Just over a decade ago, the Government abolished the area health authorities and gave as their reasons for doing so that AHAs were too large to be managed effectively and that authority members were necessarily remote from the patient in the hospital and in the community. They said that what was needed was a pattern of operational authorities similar to single district authorities. Now, we are told that the functions of the authority have changed, with its operations reduced, as it no longer provides services or manages hospitals, so it is no longer viable in its old form.

However, the strategic role of the authority has not changed. It is still expected to assess and provide for the health needs of the local community and to play a role in enhancing primary care through an ever-more integrated set of relationships with local social services and community health councillors, and in improving its population's health. Most importantly, it is a purchaser of care for the local community.

In January, the Minister told us that the reason for the mergers was the savings that could be made on administration, which would be worth several hundreds of thousands of pounds over time, but he could not be more precise. I am sure that he could achieve similar savings elsewhere in the NHS if the sole objective were to provide a service without taking into account need and quality of care. As a large majority of the changes have already taken place, will the Minister assure the House that the health authorities will at least be accountable and sensitive to the public health needs of their different communities? One way to ensure that would be to have directly elected health authorities, for which we have been calling for a number of years, instead of what we have now—political appointees.

11.22 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is a disgrace that a matter of such importance should be debated only because of action by the Opposition parties. However, that is in line with the outrageous behaviour of

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

the Government towards the NHS. They have split up the service into non-viable units and made trusts the centrepiece of their policy, when they know that the trusts do not have the money to deliver the services. What is more, they have now produced these orders.

The system began on 1 April. The Department of Health made no attempt to pass the correct information to any of the services concerned and many of those services do not have the software in their expensive computers to run the contracts that the Secretary of State tells us are the purpose behind the way in which she wants to operate the NHS. It is an outrage that incompetent, overweeningly arrogant behaviour can produce a result that will lead to total chaos and will add enormously to the expense.

There is a case for the National Audit Office to look at the operation of computers not just in one health authority but throughout the NHS. It is clear that, under the aegis of the Government, many private computer companies are getting away with enormous sums of money under the guise of offering a better contracts system. If the order goes through, retrospectively many health authorities will have to amend their contracts. That will cost them not only time, but an enormous amount of money.

If the Minister thinks that I am exaggerating, let him break the habit of a lifetime and speak to the people who work in the service. They will tell him time and again that, far from relating to "coterminosity", the order relates only to chaos and incompetence. Let me point out to the Minister that, in Crewe, coterminosity does not relate to "the borough of Crewe and Nantwich; the borough of Congleton (except the parishes of Congleton, Hulme Walfield . . . the district of Vale Royal . . . Macclesfield . . . Aston, Dutton, Frodsham"
and various other areas.

The Secretary of State, through her minions, is destroying the existing administration of what was one of the best and most cheaply administered health systems in the world—a system that spent only 6 per cent. on administration. Under the present Government, it is not only tripling the number of administrators, but doing so in a grossly incompetent and irresponsible manner. If the people had the opportunity to know what secretive, impossible and unfortunate deals they were doing, they would be taken by the scruff of their necks and thrown out tomorrow.

I had the unfortunate experience of listening to two of those non-elected gentlemen. They were on a train, explaining how they would rearrange the health service in my area: their plans included building a large, very specialised surgical unit in the north of the country, because it had always been the dream of one of these Conservative party nominations.

That is what the Government have made of the health service. I know that they will not be ashamed of themselves; but if the Minister seriously thinks that he can do this in secret, he underestimates the House of Commons.

11.26 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I support the effective speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn). I came into the Chamber expecting a very different performance from the Minister. Earlier today, we were told that the Prime Minister had instructed Ministers to act differently—that they were to be less arrogant and to listen more. This evening's display from the Minister demonstrates that, although he may have listened, he has heard nothing. He has heard none of the objections put to him during the process of merging authorities; he has not heard—and, indeed, seemed not to understand when my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) drew attention to it—that 10 May is later than 1 April and that there is a gap of some six weeks within which authorities have been acting without parliamentary approval. Moreover, he clearly had not listened to, or understood, anything about what is going on in the areas that he is now merging.

Part of my constituency covers part of Wear Valley district council, which was in the South West Durham health authority area. It is a very mixed area: although very rural, it contains a number of industrial villages—or villages that used to be industrial—in which there are severe health problems. It has very little in common with the population covered by the Darlington authority. No member of the health authority now lives remotely near the area that I represent; no member has any contact—through business, through the voluntary sector or in any other way—with my constituents who are now covered by the new authority. I have been unable to discover the voting habits of the people concerned; if they are Tories they are very exceptional in our area, but I am sure that the Minister has spent a long time looking for them.

The Minister has demonstrated that he knows and understands little of the area's needs. His justifications for merger do not hold up in our area. Financial reasons only justify it, yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) said, they are undermined by the Government having spent vastly greater sums on the members of these smaller and unaccountable authorities than they did on the members of larger authorities, who were accountable because those authorities were elected.

Arrogance, lack of attention to democratic procedures and centralisation are the hallmark of this order. It is about time that the Government began to listen to and heard what the electors are saying. If the Minister thinks that we are wrong, why does not he put it to an election?

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Blunkett (seated and covered): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My colleagues and I heard no one on the Conservative Benches object.

Mr. Sackville: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) shouted no. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Whip shouted no. I clearly heard him. Clear the Lobbies.

The House having divided: Ayes 187, Noes 235.

Division No. 281] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene	Armstrong, Hilary
Ainger, Nick	Barnes, Harry
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Barron, Kevin
Alton, David	Battle, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Bayley, Hugh
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Beith, Rt Hon A. J.

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hoh Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Robert Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

European Community Documents

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

Distance Selling

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7151/92, relating to the protection of consumers in respect of contracts negotiated at a distance (distance selling); and supports the Government's view that the draft Directive will need some amendment if it is to be acceptable.

Agriculture (Fraud)

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11235/92, relating to European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Guarantee Section anti-fraud measures; and supports the Government in its intention to continue to press the Commission to take further measures to safeguard expenditure from the Community budget.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Social Security (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Social Security (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

Fire Services (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Fire Services (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 25th March, be approved.

Traffic Wardens

That the draft Functions of Traffic Wardens (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 29th March, be approved.

Marine Pollution

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 14th April, be approved.

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 14th April, be approved.

Judges

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges (No. 2) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21st April, be approved.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL
[MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified——

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of moneys provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17 May, the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion moved by Mr. James Arbuthnot on 2nd April relating to Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill not later than half-past Eleven o'clock or one and a half hours after the resumption of those proceedings, whichever is the earlier; and the said proceedings may continue after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Juvenile Crime

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

11.41 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be accorded this Adjournment debate on the important subject of law and order, and especially of juvenile crime. I am delighted to see some of my hon. Friends here. It is interesting that no Opposition Member is here to listen to this debate. [HON. MEMBERS: "There is one."] I see that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) has scurried back. Juvenile crime is an important matter, which is of massive public concern.

To give an idea of the up-to-date nature of the topic, I read from the *Daily Mail* of Saturday 8 May. The editorial is entitled:

"Learning lessons from bitter defeat"

and says:

"What really concerns people in the country is the seemingly inexorable decline in law and order and the deteriorating education system. They link these two factors—together with the breakdown of the family—to what is perceived to be endemic moral decay."

More specifically on the subject of juvenile crime, Professor Hoghughi, the director of the Aycliffe centre for children, said in an article on 1 March this year:

"In nearly 30 years of working with disordered and delinquent young people, I have never seen such a tide of public anxiety about their condition and behaviour. Yet the horrors we see now are nothing to what is coming unless we take fundamental measures with some of our alienated young people."

The Home Affairs Committee report, Government initiatives on secure training orders—about which we shall no doubt hear from my hon. Friend the Minister in a few minutes—and the comment that I heard from a senior police officer in my constituency to the effect that society has gone soft on punishment all suggest a significant concern about juvenile crime in Britain.

Statistics in this policy area are notoriously unreliable. We know that about 5·3 million crimes were committed last year—unfortunately, a record—20 per cent. of which were committed by juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17. Sadly, that means that no less than one third of males will have had at least some form of criminal conviction by the time they reach the age of 31, and 20 per cent. of criminal offenders are under the age of 18. The Association of Chief Police Officers said in its evidence on juvenile crime to the Home Affairs Committee that it felt that, taking into account detection rates and conditional and informal cautioning, juvenile offending had risen by about 54 per cent. in real terms over the past 10 years. We know that the peak ages of offending are 15 for girls and 16 or 17 for young men.

Nevertheless, that is only part of the problem. The main part of the problem, as has been generally recognised, is caused by persistent offenders. It is estimated that 1 per cent. of 20-year-old offenders are responsible for about 60 per cent. of the crimes committed by that age group. In their evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the chief police officers gave a litany of cases in which young people, seemingly without any idea of law and order or right and wrong, continue to commit crimes with relative impunity. Last year, we heard of a 15-year-old from Leeds who had committed no fewer than 400 offences, stealing cars worth £3 million, without being called before the court in any

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

meaningful way. Stourport police in my constituency estimate that, if they could lock up 20 young offenders, they could reduce crime in the area by no less than two thirds.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is my hon. Friend aware that, at a public meeting in my constituency on Friday, the police told me that, if they could take 10 young criminals out of the system in one of my areas, they could reduce by half the amount of crime being perpetrated in that area?

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

Sadly, many people perceive the criminal justice system at present as no deterrent; it causes young criminals no particular anxiety. One young criminal, Kevin—that is not his real name—was recently quoted in the *Evening Standard* as saying:

"I don't regret being a thief. These have been the best two years of my life"—

the boy is 16.

"I'll steal while I can because I enjoy it. I'm addicted to it."

Next comes the most significant part:

"It feels fantastic going into a shop taking what you want and knowing nothing can be done to you."

The reasons behind juvenile crime are very varied: they include degrees of parental control, unrealistic expectations in a society that is possibly over-addicted to advertising and violence on the television—a factor whose importance Dr. Susan Bailey has emphasised. There is also no real peer group pressure on young people to make responsible use of time.

I welcome initiatives, particularly those involving the police and education authorities—such as the one in Brighton—and social service departments, voluntary agencies, agencies such as Crime Concern, the Citizenship Foundation and police liaison, all working within the community to prevent people from committing crime in the first instance.

Yet, as the Police Federation has said:

"While police officers and members of the various social services have striven to find appropriate solutions, the objects of their concerns have gone on offending and formed the well-founded opinion that they have nothing to fear from the law."

The chief police officers say that too often the diversion of young offenders from custody has been seen as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. The Police Federation has also said:

"There is an almost Pavlovian reaction to any concept of punishment being restored to the juvenile justice system."

That attitude has been underpinned by the Criminal Justice Act 1982, the 1988 Green Paper and the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which Lord Chief Justice Taylor called a straitjacket on the discretion of the courts to deal adequately with young offenders.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does my hon. Friend agree that the frustration encountered by our constituents, the police and, indeed, the courts in coping with persistent young offenders was one of the factors that led to the defeat of so many Conservative candidates in last week's county elections?

Mr. Coombs: I agree entirely. That is why I started with the quotation from the post-election analysis in the *Daily Mail*, which backs up my hon. Friend's statement consistently.

The result of the rehabilitative policy, if I may call it that, is that the use of custodial sentences and other more rigorous forms of punishment as a deterrent for young offenders, which would make them see the difference between right and wrong and have some respect for the law, has declined. Custodial sentences for juveniles have declined by 65 per cent. in the past 10 years from 63,200 to only 17,200. The number of 14 to 16-year-old males receiving custodial sentences between 1981 and 1991 dropped from 5,900 to 1,400.

Even the use of fines has dropped. The proportion of cases in which fines are used for 14 to 16-year old males who are convicted fell between 1981 and 1991 from 32 per cent. to only 14 per cent. Meanwhile, the use of formal or informal cautions has rocketed. For the same age group, it has increased from 51 per cent. to 71 per cent. of cases. I have even come across 14 cases in which 14 to 17-year-olds have been cautioned even in cases of conspiracy to murder and threats to murder.

Therefore, it is small wonder that I was told by a senior police officer in my constituency today that he heard one young offender who was well known to the police say, "How many more chances do I get?" That trend has been underpinned, if such is the right word, by section 29 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which does not allow magistrates sufficient leeway to take into account previous convictions. Lord Chief Justice Taylor said:

"Members of the public may feel that if someone commits 135 offences of a particular kind, it is somewhat strange if judges can only take account of one of them as well as the one they are sentencing on."

Section 63 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 also removed the option of sending people who were 15 to youth offender institutions.

What should be done to rectify the problem? Let us be positive, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that is what the public expect us to be. First, section 63 ought to be reformed so that people of 15 years of age or even younger can be given custodial sentences, and rigorous custodial sentences at that. Secondly, section 29 of the Act ought to be reformed in line with the position in Scotland, where before conviction pre-sentencing reports are prepared which include details of the offender's previous offences. Such reports should be available to the judge or the magistrates.

I am delighted that the Government are planning secure training places now. The Government should provide a continuum of further penalties for older young offenders in secure accommodation. New guidelines on cautioning are expected. They cannot come too soon.

The main point that I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of the House is that the regime for punishment of juvenile offenders must be much stricter than it is at present. There is no doubt that attendance centres are uneven in their availability to magistrates in sentencing young people. They cater for people under 16 for a maximum of 24 hours. I visited an attendance centre in Droitwich recently. Attendance centres are mild in the extreme. They rely on exhortation and a little physical exercise, but sadly, given the cautioning policy, they are now dealing, according to the

police officers who run them, with much more hardened criminals than used to be the case, so their usefulness is commensurately reduced.

Community service orders apply for between 40 and 240 hours. Too often I have heard them described—it is also my evidence—as a sort of mild, lukewarm version of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Frequently there are no educational requirements, so that they are not oriented towards the national vocational qualification. Small wonder that 30 per cent. of those who attended them in 1991 breached the orders.

We know that youth offender institutions have spare capacity, but they must be much more rigorous. It is not sufficient for youngsters to go to those institutions and have only 15 hours of education—the recently recommended Home Office standard. Nor is it enough for young people to go to them to do just five hours a week of physical exercise.

If those institutions are to be deterrents—if they are to represent a greater constructive deterrence than the short, sharp shock detention regimes of the early 1980s—young people must stay at them far longer than 30 days, which is effectively the minimum, and too often common practice. When they go there, they must find slightly more rigour than those I visited, which would not do much harm to a minor public school.

If they are to be real deterrents, the prison officers and social workers in them must be told that not only will there be rehabilitation, not only will there be a continuum of education from what was being done in the youth offender institution before release—post-release work is obviously important—but that they must be rigorous and unpleasant, and, as a result, the word must go round in the persistent offending community that they are places one goes to at one's peril and to which one does not want to return in a hurry.

Having made those proposals for greater rigour in our sentencing regime—at attendance centres, for community service orders and at youth offender institutions—I must point out the appalling fact that, according to the latest figures, only two in every 100 offences result in a criminal conviction. So when criminal convictions are obtained, they must be rigorous and act as a deterrent.

While I appreciate that the rehabilitation of young offenders will involve understanding, too often that form of understanding has been misread by young people in this country as a means of justifying their position—a justification of why they are offending and therefore an excuse for it. If we take the sort of initiatives that I have outlined, some of which the Government are already taking, we shall make the punishment inherent in the criminal justice regime for young people much more rigorous, so enabling us to restore confidence in the system for the British people as a whole.

11.57 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Jack): I wish at the outset to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on securing this debate on a very important subject. I underline and endorse the concerns he expressed about juvenile justice.

I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) for being in their places at this late hour to add their support. I appreciate that my near parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, has been a stalwart campaigner on the matter, and he conveys the rigour of his commitment to the cause to the House tonight, as he has on behalf of his constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest began by talking about public anxiety over the issue. Much as I have sympathy, as I shall illustrate in practical terms, with much of what he said, juvenile justice is an intensely complex area.

We should not try to act as apologists for the wrongdoing of the young criminals. Many of them are very young, however, and I know that my hon. Friend would agree that, when one visits the institutions in which they are incarcerated, one realises that they may have suffered from physical or sexual abuse, and that they may not have had a loving relationship with their parents. They may not have received the guidance that would have kept them from their wrongdoing.

My hon. Friend is right to talk about rigour, but I hope that he will couple that with effectiveness. It is important that we should consider what we are trying to achieve, under whatever rigorous regime we impose. Our ultimate aim must be to communicate to such young people that they should not go back into society and reoffend. The track record of ensuring that reoffending is kept at a suitably low rate has not been good.

My hon. Friend referred to the difficult issue of statistics. Time does not permit me to underline some of the calculations to which my hon. Friend referred and which ACPO made in an attempt to demonstrate the size of the problem. There is no difference between any commentators, however, when we come to discuss the marked persistency of reoffending among young people.

The number of juveniles known to have committed crimes has fallen sharply in the past decade. In 1991, those under the age of 18 comprised 17 per cent. of known offenders compared with 25 per cent. in 1985 and 26 per cent. in 1981. What seems to be the case, however, is that those young people who offend tend to offend more often. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of findings of guilt per offender aged between 14 and 16 sentenced in court rose from 1·7 to 2. Those statistics underline the point that my hon. Friend was right to make: that persistence must be the number one priority that we address.

It is good to be able to reply to the debate in the knowledge that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is committed to introducing, at the earliest opportunity, a secure training order, which will target the persistent juvenile offender. We have been left in no doubt by hon. Members, police officers and others that tackling those offenders, who have caused so much mayhem and havoc to our constituents, must be our number one priority.

My right hon. and learned Friend hopes that it will not be too long before the courts are provided with that new sentence. It is designed to be available for 12 to 15-year-olds who have been convicted of three imprisonable offences and who have proved unwilling or unable to comply with the requirements of supervision in the community while on remand or under sentence. The court would be empowered to impose such a sentence only when it was satisfield that that order was necessary to protect the public from further offending by a juvenile, and when a place in a suitable facility was available.

Those caveats do not diminish the effect that we hope to achieve, but they show that, by concentrating on such

[Mr. Michael Jack]

a sentence, we look to it to deal rigorously with the persistent offender—the person who, to put it bluntly, has not come to heel.

My hon. Friend referred to the education that is available in young offender institutions. A key part of the new regime would concentrate on the education and training that an offender may lack. The regime is designed to get at the heart of an offender's behaviour. We will give ourselves sufficient time in which to do that because a secure training order will be imposed for a minimum of six months or up to two years. For a young person between the age of 12 and 15, that represents the possibility of his liberty being removed for an extremely long time. Moreover, I have visited a number of institutions that deal with juveniles under lock and key, and they certainly could not be described as holiday camps or pleasant places to go to.

Many of the places that I have visited that deal with section 53 young offenders are spartan, have rigorous regimes and are not entirely pleasant. But they have one thing in common—they try to concentrate on educating the juveniles and getting to the heart of the offending behaviour. Our regime is different, because it will focus on the problems of the persistent juvenile offender. I can assure my hon. Friend that it is our earnest intention to provide up to 200 such places as soon as we can to enable the persistent juvenile offender to be dealt with. I hope that that reassures him.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Is my hon. Friend hopeful that he will gain the support of the Opposition? They seemed to undergo a conversion to law and order recently, but does not my hon. Friend find it amazing that there is not a single Labour Member or a single Liberal Democrat present for tonight's debate on an extremely important subject?

Mr. Jack: I join my hon. Friend is saying that it is disappointing that the Opposition Benches are utterly deserted this evening. I have found it difficult to obtain an unequivocal endorsement of our policy proposal. I have challenged the Opposition from the Dispatch Box on a number of occasions and, sadly, they have not given a clear and ringing endorsement of our policy. They have their own version of the policy, but it is not ours and it is not focused on the needs of the persistent juvenile offender. That is something that we have done, but they have not.

It is important to consider the effectiveness of the policy. I acknowledge that we need to do more work when we consider the statistics of juvenile crime. But in sectors where research has been conducted, such as the Hereford and Worcester young offenders project, it has been found that, of those who went into custody, 86 per cent. reoffended, whereas 67 per cent. of those on community supervision reoffended.

I am not proud that 67 per cent. of the latter reoffended, and more work needs to be done in that sphere, but there is a measurable and significant difference between the effectiveness of placing people in custody and punishing people in the community. While more work needs to be done on improving the effectiveness—the new national standards that we have introduced into the probation service will lend an enhanced rigour to the punishment—we must remain aware of the fact that there is a significant difference in the reoffending rate of those who go into custody.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I advise my hon. Friend to be careful when drawing such a conclusion from the reoffending rates of those who go into custody for the simple reason that, with the current regime on cautioning and sentencing, the sort of young people who progress all the way to custody are so imbued with the ways of life of habitual crime that they are likely to reoffend in any event.

Mr. Jack: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I hope that, in concentrating my remarks on what the secure training order will achieve, I can show him that we are trying to address the problem that he mentioned.

My hon. Friend also mentioned cautioning. I agree that we must not undervalue cautioning as a first point of contact with the criminal justice system. Only 3 per cent. of cautions are given to juveniles who have already had two or more cautions. There has been a feeling that cautions are given out like sweets, but that is not so. Some 87 per cent. of those cautioned in 1985 were not convicted within two years. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I are looking carefully at possible ways in which cautioning as a first encounter can be improved by attaching certain conditions.

It is important to recognise that 87 per cent. of those cautioned in 1985 were not convicted within two years of the caution. Sometimes a caution can be a useful shock to the system, to promote an attitude of "so far and no further". We take that matter seriously.

My hon. Friend mentioned attendance centres. I have also visited an attendance centre. When one considers the raw material with which attendance centres and probation centres have to deal, it becomes clear that such people are not the easiest with which to work. For somebody aged 12, 13 or 14, the attendance centre represents deprivation of liberty, and it is probably the first time that they have had to remain in one place for a period.

There is the rigour of physical activity and a skill such as woodwork to occupy them. It is a first encounter with some form of custody. For those young people, it can be a useful reminder of what could come next if they do not learn some lessons in discipline. We are looking at ways and means of improving the regime in attendance centres, and the points raised by my hon. Friend will serve well to assist those working in them.

My hon. Friend mentioned expanding the range of juvenile disposals. We are looking at the scope and scale of offences covered by section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 to see whether certain offences should be brought into the range of custodial disposals.

My hon. Friend went on to discuss the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I hope that he will know from the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend that we intend to take on board the views of right hon. and hon. Members, particularly on matters relating to section 29 of the Act. I am sure that my hon. Friend will see the Home Secretary's recent statements as confirmation of that.

My hon. Friend mentioned regimes in young offender institutions. I counsel him to go to the Nightingale unit at Feltham. He will find that it is not a particularly pleasant place. However, he will find 15 hours of education and five hours of physical activity. He will also find guidance and counselling on alcoholism and drugs and other activities

that bring a rigour to the regime there in not particularly pleasant surroundings. Anger control is also addressed. A real attempt is made to deal with some of the most difficult offenders that one will find, some having committed some of the worst crimes in the country. My hon. Friend will not find a holiday camp atmosphere at Feltham—far from it. Instead, there is a determination to get hold of those young people in order to give them some rigour and discipline to enable them to go back into society and not reoffend again.

Finally, the short, sharp shock treatment to which my hon. Friend referred briefly was not particularly successful as 75 per cent. of the people reoffended. We are trying to introduce young people to some of the rigours of prison, a scheme presently existing on trial to enable some people to sample——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Monday evening, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eleven minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

DUNHAM BRIDGE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read the Third time, and passed

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Standard Assessment Tasks

1. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools he has received representations from urging him to make this year's SATs voluntary; and what proportion this is of the total number of schools in the state system.

4. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will direct the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to consider simplifying tests at seven, 11 and 14 years of age on the principle of establishing tests that take minimal teacher and pupil time while being effective measures of achievement of basic skills.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): Since the beginning of the year, the Department has received about 6,500 letters about testing, making many different points. I have asked Sir Ron Dearing to review the national curriculum and assessment framework with the aim of simplifying it while retaining the key features of clear teaching objectives, regular tests and high standards. I shall, with permission, make a statement about further arrangements later today.

Mrs. Roche: Given the widespread opinion among parents, school governors, teachers and his own advisers, why cannot the Secretary of State give a clear and unambiguous commitment to withdraw those fatally flawed tests this year?

Mr. Patten: The tests to which the hon. Lady has referred—for example, the tests for seven-year-olds—have been proceeding satisfactorily since 1991. They were taken again in 1992. In most primary schools up and down the land, they have been successfully completed already.

Mr. Wells: May I urge my right hon. Friend to continue and to persist with testing? Surely the original idea was that the tests should be short, sharp and easily marked, and that they would lead to a proper assessment of the place that each child had reached. There would then be possibilities of remedial action and teaching could be accelerated to higher standards for those able to achieve them. Is not that the objective?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the great Education Reform Act 1988, our whole aim was to begin to catch up with our competitors who had had national curricula and assessment regimes for many decades. It is the Government's intention to continue to catch up as rapidly as possible with our international competitors, while making the national curriculum and the associated testing arrangements as slim and manageable as possible—a process which we have already started with the tests for seven-year-olds.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Secretary of State tell us how many of those 6,500 letters were in favour of the Government's arrangements for testing? Does he recall my advice to him in Education Question Time on 17 November, when I suggested that he should consult his Scottish ministerial colleagues and listen to their explanation of how they had established a system of assessment that enjoyed the confidence of parents and teachers? Why is the Scottish system so unacceptable to English Ministers? Does the Secretary of State's arrogance stretch to his ministerial colleagues? Did he hear the Prime Minister say that Ministers should curb their arrogance? To which Cabinet Ministers does he think the Prime Minister was referring?

Mr. Patten: Two things about that: The 6,500 letters that we have received since the beginning of the year contain a wide range of views because—*[Interruption.]* No—listen, listen. Would the hon. Lady be good enough to listen? The letters contain a wide range of views because anything at all concerning testing, assessment or the curriculum always attracts a wide range of strong and passionate concerns. One is always going to get that and I welcome it because I think that the country needs a great debate on education. The more the general public who are interested and concerned want to write in giving their points of view, the more I welcome it.

I was asked a second question, which I must answer briefly, Madam Speaker. In Scotland, they do not have a Education Reform Act or a statutory national curriculum. The system in Scotland as far as education is concerned is as different as the situation in Scotland is concerned as far as law is concerned where they have a Roman law system.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a significant proportion of the letters that his Department has received about testing related to key stage 3 testing, and that much of the evidence on key stage 1 testing—which is now in force in many of our schools and which has been reformed in the light of experience over the past three years—suggests that it is now beginning to bring benefits, as recent Her Majesty's inspectorate reports have shown? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in this whole debate, the principle of testing is not negotiable but is an integral part of the Government's reforms?

Mr. Patten: There is not an inch between my hon. Friend and me on the issue of testing. I can certainly confirm that a number of the 6,500 letters were about key stage 3 testing. Many more were about key stage 1 testing at age seven. I must tell my hon. Friend and the House that we are awaiting the results of a ballot held by the National Union of Teachers, which wishes to stop, not only this year

but next year, teaching at all levels; I am so sorry, it wishes to stop testing at all levels—at seven, 11 and 14—not only in 1993 but in 1994, including those very successful tests for seven-year-olds which Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools yesterday commended when he launched the Office for Standards in Education's five-year corporate plan.

Mr. Steinberg: Does the Secretary of State agree that, given that the tests have proved to be flawed, that the vast majority of teachers propose to boycott them and that parents are totally against them, the tests really cannot go ahead? If the Secretary of State finds that he cannot get his own way—due to his arrogance—will he introduce legislation to force teachers to carry out the tests?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman must wait and see what is in the Queen's speech this year, next year or the year after. The hon. Gentleman has a perfectly legitimate interest, which he has declared, in the NUT. I can tell him that I have had his friend Mr. McAvoy in for a cup of tea in my Department to discuss these issues. Mr. McAvoy —who, I can reveal, I actually quite like personally, although I disagree with him profoundly on professional matters—has told me that he is totally against regular testing of children at key stages year by year and totally against the publication of results school by school.

English

2. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received from the Queen's English Society on the teaching of spoken English; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: I have received no direct representations from the Queen's English Society, but I know that the society was one of the bodies whose evidence the National Curriculum Council took into account in framing its recent recommendations for changes to the national curriculum English, which I warmly welcome.

We believe that the proposals that we published for consultation on 15 April will help to ensure that pupils develop confidence and competence in their use of spoken English, and, more generally, will raise expectations and standards in the subject, which is critically important.

Mr. Brandreth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Queen's English has nothing to do with accent and everything to do with communication? Is he aware that recently the business community has reckoned that problems with literacy and numeracy are costing industry some £4·8 billion a year and that business is crying out for the Government to do something about literacy, numeracy and communication skills for our young people?

Mr. Patten: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's points, made with his characteristically clear diction, in standard English throughout. My hon. Friend is quite right. We have been told by the adult literacy and basic skills unit that the cost to industry of young people going in without adequate skills and without being able to express themselves is between £4 billion and £5 billion a year. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree that it is critically clear that, when youngsters leave school and make job applications, they are able to make those applications in clear written English and that they are able to answer questions in interviews in the clearest possible way. That is why the speaking of standard English is so important and why I welcome the views of the society.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware that those of us who were never learnt to speak English proper certainly do not lack the intellectual ability to discern that in these issues, as in many others, the Secretary of State is a complete Gombeen—that is an Irish expression—and nor do we lack the ability to communicate those issues? When we have a Secretary of State—I appreciate that he is a little nervous today—who tells the House about "a education" and "Mr. McAvoy who I met in my office", he is in no position to begin to educate young people up and down the country on the benefits of standard English or, indeed, any other way of communicating properly and adequately in the English language.

Mr. Patten: Not for the first time in answering the hon. Gentleman's questions, I am completely confused because of his failure to put them clearly. All that I can say is that it is critically important for all of us to be able to express ourselves as clearly as possible, as the *Hansard* report of what I have said will make clear tomorrow and as anyone who is listening will have heard. I hope that the hon. Gentleman shares with me—I did not understand the Irish expression that he used—the necessity for anyone applying for a job, whether they are 16, 17, 18 or any age, to express themselves clearly in standard English. That is why standard English and the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council are so important.

Universities (Tuition Fees)

3. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he monitors the promptness of payments of tuition fees by local authorities to universities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): Local education authorities have a statutory duty to pay tuition fees promptly by the dates specified in the Mandatory Awards Regulations. The Department takes action on any evidence of failure to comply.

Mr. Batiste: Is my hon. Friend aware that last year a number of local authorities were late in passing on tuition fees, which they had received from the Government, to universities and that there is some evidence that that pattern has been repeated this year? Is it not entirely wrong that higher education should be denied funds because of late payment by local authorities? Is it not time that the Government thought about the way in which money could be transferred direct to universities without going through the post box of local government?

Mr. Boswell: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is most unsatisfactory if payments are not made in time. It is not even in the interests of the local authorities, because they do not get interest on the money, which is lodged in a special account with the Paymaster General. It is sometimes a matter of administrative complication or failure. We most vigorously investigate those cases in which, under the existing award system, it is apparently impossible for them to pay on time, as they should.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Minister find out why the problem does not arise in Scotland and see whether he can apply the

lessons learnt there to the situation in England? Will he accept from me that, the last time I checked, universities were owed almost £100 million after the date on which payment was due? One in five local authorities is a late payer, and some local authorities pay the fees for the second term before the fees for the first term. Any half-awake local authority treasurer who is handed, effectively, control of millions of pounds of central Government funds to pass on without any penalty for late payment will work that money for his or her employer or local authority. Is it not time that some sort of interest penalty was placed on the late payment of tuition fees and at the same time, while we are thinking about it, an interest penalty paid for the late payment of mandatory award grants to students, who suffer just as badly?

Mr. Boswell: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments about Scotland, have taken note of them and am aware of the situation there. We have improved the system in England. There is no advantage to local authorities, because the money lodged to their credit by the due date does not attract interest in their hands. We watch carefully for failures to pay and will tighten that up. He also mentioned the more general issue of student grants and I am concerned about any that are not paid on time. They are, or they should be, paid early in, or at the beginning of, term and that is one reason why we leave tuition fees until the end of term, to try to avoid the two becoming confused. We pursue vigorously authorities that fail to pay. There are fewer than there were, but there are still too many.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that now that the county elections are behind us, it is rumoured that Lancashire county council is proposing to abolish the appeals procedure for students seeking discretionary grants? Is not that grossly unfair to the students and further evidence of its arrogance, which has been allowed to surface now that the elections are over?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend goes wider still—the nature of discretion is that it has to be exercised. I shall take a dim view of any local authority that removes its discretion by saying that it will not consider payment in a certain case.

Surplus School Places

6. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how his Department determines whether a local authority has an apparent surplus of primary school and secondary school places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: The Department for Education conducted a survey of surplus capacity in 1991, comparing the total capacity of schools in each authority with total pupil numbers. We are consulting local education authorities on the scope for reducing that surplus, taking into account demographic and other changes since the survey.

Mr. Gapes: Is the Secretary of State aware that if he moved to Ilford, South and had an eight-year-old son or daughter in year four, he would not be able to get a place for his child in seven of the 10 schools in my constituency, and in three schools he would get a place only for a catchment area child? Highlands school in Cranbrook ward has 36 children in two classes and Christchurch primary and infant school has 35 children in every class from reception to year six. What is he going to do about it? Why is Redbridge council considering putting Portakabins on a building site to deal with the problem, yet the Government refused to allow the council to build the school that is needed in my constituency?

Mr. Patten: I appreciate the hon. Member's strength of feeling on behalf of his constituents. A basic needs formula is applied by my Department to make new school building possible when there is an established need for extra places. His question demonstrates how critically important it is for us to get to grips with the fact that there are many hundreds of thousands of surplus school places, where money is being spent on roofs and not on educating children. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support me in our campaign to ensure that those surplus places are wrung out of the system, so that money can be transferred from where it is being wasted to where it may be needed —it is up to the hon. Gentleman's local authority to make the case.

Mr. Dickens: Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether he thinks that the criteria are working, in the sense that if there are places within a 2-mile radius of an overcrowded school, it is prohibited from being rebuilt on a new site? Our hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the Under-Secretary of State for Schools, has been dealing with Holy Trinity county primary school in Dobcross, in the hills of Saddleworth. In winter 2 miles is a long way to bus children in Saddleworth, although 2 miles on the flat in an urban area is not far at all.

Mr. Patten: As my hon. Friend knows, I visited Saddleworth, at his invitation, in the winter and I know what it is like. In applying any criteria for catchment areas to schools there is a dilemma. On all occasions, we must take two things into account: first, in the interests of rural communities, we must preserve small rural schools with large catchment areas; secondly, we must make it possible for popular schools to expand. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and I have been most concerned to make advances on the latter in recent months and we hope to make announcement in the not-too-distant future.

Education Spending, Humberside

7. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the standard spending assessment for education in Humberside for each of the last two years.

Mr. Boswell: Humberside's education standard spending assessment rose by some 16 per cent. to £321 million in 1991-92 and to more than £342 million, including the additional grant for teachers' pay, in 1992-93—a rise of some 24 per cent. in two years. Its education standard spending assessment for 1993-94 is more than £305 million —an underlying increase of 1·8 per cent. allowing for the transfer of responsibility for most further education expenditure to the new funding council.

Mr. Mitchell: I thank the Minister for those statistics. Does he accept that the increase in Humberside's education SSA has been less than the national increase, resulting in the past three years in a cumulative loss of £3·5 million to the county? Does he further accept that Humberside's spending last year of more than 8 per cent.

over its SSA to give kids a bit better education has had to be cut because of the threat of budget capping? As a result of cutting the improvement over SSA, every school in Grimsby is losing between one and seven teachers and faces classes that much larger. Every child in Grimsby will receive an education that much worse than it should be. Does the Minister regard that as acceptable?

Mr. Boswell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware from his local knowledge that the number of pupils in Humberside is static. The national numbers show a 1·2 per cent. increase in the current year. The difference in funding reflects that specific fact. If the hon. Gentleman does not like the present formula, it is open to him at any stage to suggest an alternative formula to my colleagues in the Department of the Environment. If he can find a formula that commands universal acceptance, including among his colleagues, he will be a clever man indeed. The present formula seeks to balance all the factors in the fairest possible way between local education authorities.

Mr. Michael Brown: Is not the real position that Humberside county council simply does not know how to manage its budget? In neighbouring Lincolnshire, the local authority under Conservative control—*[Interruption.]*—at least until last Thursday, was able, and I hope will still be able, to deliver education to the people of Lincolnshire with more resources. Does my hon. Friend agree that in Lincolnshire a higher proportion of expenditure previously went on education than is likely to be the case under the new arrangements in Lincolnshire?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend is precisely right as usual. I am sure that the good work done previously by Lincolnshire county council will stand to its advantage when it is remembered in due course.

English

8. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures he is taking to improve standards in the teaching of English in schools.

11. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the proposals for the revision of English in the national curriculum.

Mr. Patten: The new proposals for English, which I published together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on 15 April, aim to simplify, streamline and strengthen the present curriculum by defining more clearly the essential skills which English teaching should promote and reducing the number of requirements to be satisfied. We believe that the proposals will provide a firmer structure to ensure that pupils acquire knowledge and understanding of the English language, grammar and vocabulary, as well as the ability to speak it with confidence. They should also ensure that pupils learn about their literary heritage and study the works of our greatest writers.

In the light of consultation on our proposals in England and Wales, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I expect to publish a draft order for a revised English curriculum later in the year for further statutory consultation.

Mr. Coombs: In view of the difficulties in reading and writing experienced by a significant minority of 14-year-olds and 16-year-olds according to the National Curriculum Council and given the streamlining of the English curriculum mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, does he agree with Sir Ron Dearing and Stewart Sutherland that it is crucial that tests for 14-year-olds in English go ahead this year? Does he further agree that it is craven almost to the extent of Pontius Pilate for the Opposition to argue in favour of tests on principle while refusing to condemn the boycott of the tests by many teachers which would damage the tests so badly in practice?

Mr. Patten: To answer the second of my hon. Friend's two questions first, many people say that they are in favour of a national curriculum and testing but are afraid to come forward and set out exactly what they mean. That behaviour has been characteristic of the Opposition throughout the past year.

On my hon. Friend's first point, testing is critical not just for 14-year-olds but for seven-year-olds. As Sir Ron Dearing and Professor Stewart Sutherland, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, said yesterday, the testing of seven-year-olds has not only led to some improvements and a greater expectation among teachers of what they can expect from their children, but demonstrated that two out of three children aged seven cannot read the simplest words. It is those children who need to be helped throughout their school careers and that is why we need the testing regime that we have introduced.

Mr. Thomason: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is totally unacceptable that 30 per cent. of 16-year-olds are unable to master the basic reading skills expected of people of that age? Will he ensure that under the national curriculum, to which he referred a moment ago, the proper teaching of English is introduced?

Mr. Patten: It is entirely right that the National Curriculum Council recommendations should concentrate to a greater extent on the basics—standard English, reading and writing. It is always right to reveal problems that have been hidden. It was only in this past year that we discovered, for the first time, that some 300,000 16-year-old school leavers going on to further education had a reading age of 14 years or less. That must be put right and that is why we need the slimmer national curriculum English orders, which are now in draft. That is why we need testing and why, and how, we must catch up with our international competitors. In France, for example, the testing of eight and 11-year-olds has gone on for decades.

Mr. Enright: Will the Secretary of State explain how affixing captions to "Pam's Paper pictures" assists in the tests for 14-year-olds? Would he not be better advised to correct the English used by the other Departments of Her Majesty's Government, which send out to us appallingly written documents in appalling numbers?

Mr. Patten: I remember that during our most recent debate on education the hon. Gentleman got into a muddle about the membership of his own union. He could not even remember the name of his union, to which he referred incorrectly. What I can say to the hon. Gentleman —*[Interruption.]* Order. I think that when the testing of 14-year-olds takes place this summer and the results have been published, some time after those tests have been

taken, people will wonder what on earth the fuss was about and they will see exactly what good those tests will do.

Mr. Dafis: The Secretary of State will be aware of the views of the Curriculum Council for Wales on the rather questionable entity of standard English. It strongly disapproves of the principle that children aged six or seven should have their English corrected to bring it into line with the so-called standard form. I wonder whether the Secretary of State would care to congratulate that organisation on its good sense. As part of the process of making the proposed curriculum and assessment authority for Wales genuinely autonomous, will he ensure that the council's recommendations are accepted in Wales?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am not responsible for education in Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is consulting on the draft proposals from the Curriculum Council for Wales and I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's views are drawn to his attention.

Special Needs Education

9. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will take steps to improve the process of statementing children; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): The Education Bill, now in another place, builds on the Education Act 1981, creating a new framework for all children with special educational needs. Pupils who need statements will benefit from many of the new arrangements, including time limits on the making of assessments and statements. We shall issue comprehensive, practical guidance to local education authorities and schools in the form of a code of practice.

Mr. Steen: That is all very well, but is my hon. Friend aware that there are children with special needs in some of the most deprived urban areas who have to wait up to three years before they can be tested because of the philosophical and political views of the local authority, which is opposed to the testing? Will he consider enlarging the powers of the ombudsman so that parents can go direct to the ombudsman, who can then direct local authorities, mostly Labour, to get a move on?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is correct in identifying unacceptable delays in producing statements of special educational needs and also unacceptable variations between authorities. We are well aware of the problems and they are exactly what the Bill, now in another place, will address. We shall issue regulations to put time limits on the statementing process; we shall issue a code of practice to introduce a standard format for statements to ensure that all children are uniformly and properly cared for; and we shall introduce a tribunal to give genuinely independent advice and be an independent source of appeal to parents who feel that they have not been properly treated.

If my hon. Friend looks at what is in our Bill and at the code of practice and tribunals that will follow, he will see that the problems that he has identified will be dealt with fairly and firmly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister accept that, although what he said is likely to produce an improvement in the present situation, which all too often leads to heart-rending difficulties for parents and children, even today a lobby of the House is being organised by the Spastics Society in which several hundred parents will have terrible stories to tell of the stress that they have been caused by the statementing process? Those parents remain dissatisfied with the provisions of the Education Bill, particularly with regard to the resources to meet the needs of any child with a statement. Will the Minister now commit himself to making sure that all local education authorities have the resources to provide for the needs specified in any child's statement?

Mr. Forth: I am very much aware of the views of the Spastics Society and I keep them closely under review. The society has not yet perhaps fully appreciated the advances that the Bill represents. I hope that when it realises what the code of practice and the regulations to follow mean, it will be happier than it now appears to be with that advance.

I believe that local authorities have the right resources to provide for statements and for those children with special needs who are not covered by a statement. The fact that the proportion of children statemented by local educational authorities varies between just over 1 per cent. in some authorities to more than 4 per cent. in others demonstrates that different authorities have taken different views up to now and that parents and their children, therefore, have tended to be treated differently. The Bill will address that problem and will make uniform the content of statements and the approach to be taken. I hope that the Spastics Society and all the other special educational needs interest groups will welcome that when they have reflected on it and seen the full development of our proposals under the Bill.

Grant-maintained Schools

10. **Dr. Liam Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent surveys have been conducted into the operation of grant-maintained schools; and what are the main findings.

Mr. Patten: The Grant Maintained Schools Centre published the results of its latest annual survey of self-governing grant maintained schools in November last year. They demonstrate how self-governing schools are benefiting from the freedom to manage their own affairs and control their own budget.

The report by the Office for Standards in Education on 81 grant-maintained schools, published on 30 March, concluded that grant-maintained schools were adapting well to their new framework and were taking advantage of the new opportunities that grant-maintained status offered. The report also noted that grant-maintained schools were attracting increasing numbers of pupils.

There are about 775 grant-maintained schools today, either operating, approved or awaiting approval.

Dr. Fox: Will my right hon. Friend communicate that information to Avon education authority which has sent to parents in schools that wish to become self-governing a politically bigoted letter that amounts to emotional blackmail? Does he agree that that sort of malevolent

nonsense is likely to become an ever-greater feature of those councils that came under Labour or Liberal control last week?

Mr. Patten: I understand from papers that my hon. Friend has sent me that schools in the Woodspring constituency, like St. John the Evangelist, are feeling inhibited about going for grant-maintained status because of what they regard as coercion by Labour-controlled Avon council. That is why the Education Bill, presently in another place, will make it possible for at least a substantial amount of the effort that has been put into using council tax payers' funds by councils to intimidate schools to be brought to a halt, and quite right too.

Mrs. Mahon: Has not the Minister been embarking on crude bribery to get schools to opt out? If he denies that, will he explain why, in Calderdale, three grant-maintained schools recently received a capital improvement grant of £450,000 while the other 109 schools had to make do with £223,000? Is that not a straightforward bribe to get schools to opt out?

Mr. Patten: I am sorry that the hon. Lady is displeased that three schools in her area have had such large capital grants. In the past, successful schools, often voluntary-aided schools, have been consistently starved of capital funds that were much needed for modernisation of buildings and expansion. One of the reasons why grant-maintained status is so important is that it allows popular, oversubscribed schools the possibility of expanding, and quite right too.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the schools that have achieved grant-maintained status would like the benefits of that status to be expressed in clear terms? Those schools not only attract more pupils, provide better education by dint of better standards and have rather better teachers, but attract a larger number of people willing to come forward as governors. All those factors should be made clear to the cantankerous Liberal and Labour-controlled authorities.

Mr. Patten: I have two points for my right hon. Friend. First, there are queues of children waiting to go to grant-maintained schools, which are extremely popular. Secondly, although, in comparison with maintained schools, I have visited only a small number of grant-maintained schools, in every one that I have visited, teachers and governors have told me that they relish their new freedom to run their affairs and their schools to their own agenda. That is a central part of the Conservative philosophy on which we were elected at the last general election.

Special Schools

12. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the number of special schools operating in Manchester local education authority *(a)* five years ago, *(b)* last year and *(c)* currently.

Mr. Forth: Throughout the period in question, there have been 26 special schools and two special units in the Manchester local education authority.

Mr. Eastham: As the Minister is aware, the Government have never met their responsibilities to disabled children under the Education Act 1981. Later this year, more special schools will be closed. Will the Government give the House a firm assurance that they will make sure that there is sufficient money available for lifts, ramps, changing facilities, special toilets, furnishing and laboratory equipment, all of which will be needed for such children? It is one thing to say that we want integration in schools soon, and another to have the money to do the job.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman should talk to his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench about their attitude to the provision of special schools as opposed to those in the mainstream. It is, and rightly so, for the local education authority—in this case, Manchester—to decide how far it believes that there should be provision in special schools and units or mainstream provision. That is its responsibility and I would look to, and expect, it to discharge that responsibility properly.

Dyslexia

13. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what studies he has made into the treatment of dyslexic children in examinations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The results of a three-year research project on special educational needs and the GCSE, commissioned by the School Examinations and Assessment Council and undertaken by the centre for assessment studies at Bristol university, is due to report to the council this summer. The research report is expected to address the position of candidates suffering from various disabilities, including dyslexia.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I understand that there are wide variations in the policies and practices of examination boards in the treatment of dyslexic children. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that their special needs will be recognised, especially in relation to concessions taking into account psychologists' reports so that that untapped talented group of people can achieve its full potential?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend asks an important question. At the moment, the examining groups try, wherever possible, to take the fullest possible account of children with disabilities and difficulties, in particular dyslexia. They try to strike that difficult balance between an examining and testing process that does justice to all pupils and one that takes proper account of those with particular special needs. I will certainly look again at the matter in order to satisfy myself that the examining groups are treating it properly, but I believe that, generally speaking, they have probably got the balance about right.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Pickthall: I thank the Prime Minister and the many Cabinet Ministers who campaigned in Lancashire in recent weeks and helped Labour vastly to increase its vote and achieve a majority on the local council. Was it in Lancashire that the Government heard about the challenging environment that they faced, the big hole that they were in and the bloody nose they were about to get? Did they listen to the people of Lancashire on value added tax, testing in schools, unemployment and the attacks on local democracy? Can the people of Britain expect the Government's supposed listening to the people to be translated into action to rebuild the country, instead of the present policies which are dismantling it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman clearly deserves an A-level in smugness. Perhaps I may quote something to the hon. Gentleman from *The Sunday Times* that I have no doubt he will find of interest. The quote, which he may enjoy, reads as follows:

"Conservative set-backs in Thursday's county council elections . . . were so severe that Labour would win the general election on the same voting breakdown."

That was *The Sunday Times* in 1985. Two years later we won the election with a majority of 100.

Mr. Conway: Is my right hon. Friend feeling cheerful, because he should? Is it not the case that we have every reason to be optimistic because, of all the countries that pulled out of the exchange rate mechanism last autumn, the United Kingdom is the only country to have pulled out of recession?

The Prime Minister: The principal reason Britain has come out of recession is that we have achieved low inflation; because we have got inflation down, we were able to cut 5 per cent. off interest rates—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members on the Bench below the Gangway please desist until we get through Question Time? They can then go outside and have their own singsong.

The Prime Minister: I think that everyone was enjoying it, Madam Speaker. It was because we cut inflation that we were able to take 5 per cent. off interest rates before last September, and because we got inflation down we are now beginning to see a recovery in retail sales and exports since the spring. It is because of that that we shall see greater growth this year and next year than any other country in the European Community.

Mr. John Smith: Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether the Budget in November will be presented by the present Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)?

The Prime Minister: That is a hoary old chestnut of a question. I have not yet even begun to contemplate Cabinet changes. But I will say this: it is because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken difficult decisions that we now have inflation at a 25-year low, interest rates at a 15-year low and prospects of the fastest growth in Europe this year and next year. That is an excellent record which people will recognise long after the right hon. and learned Gentleman's undignified sniping is forgotten.

Mr. Smith: Surely the Prime Minister heard the question quite clearly. It is a simple question: will the present Chancellor present the next Budget? Cannot the Prime Minister say either yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I explained very clearly to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. If I wanted advice on Cabinet making, I would not seek it from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who last week had to sack his own economic spokesman for incompetence.

Mr. Smith: Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Smith: The Prime Minister seems to be having some difficulty with a simple question—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order and not use up time in this way.

Mr. Smith: May I give the Prime Minister a third shot at it? Will the present Chancellor present the Budget? If the Prime Minister cannot say yes, why cannot he say no?

The Prime Minister: Why does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman just admit that he has got a bloody nose? It is a good deal more dignified.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend—as a genuine, listening Prime Minister—will be aware of the alienation expressed in the constituencies last week. He will also be aware of the severe mauling given to the Maastricht treaty by the democratic process. Is he not greatly concerned about the massive alienation that would result if the ratification of this new constitution now depended on the Danes, the Whips and the courts alone?

The Prime Minister: If, as my hon. Friend intimates, the election was really about the Maastricht treaty, it is rather surprising how well some other political parties did.

Mr. Ashdown: After Srebrenica, just as I predicted, there has been Zepa. Does the Prime Minister still insist on doing nothing more to save the tens of thousands of innocents in Gorazde from a similar tragic fate?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is being deeply unfair to the efforts by both this country and a large number of other countries which are working together. The right hon. Gentleman is aware of the difficulties and also of the intense dangers of following some of the actions that he has advocated in the past. He knows what action we are proposing to take; that remains the position and we continue to discuss that and other options with our allies.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on a recent visit to estate agents in Plympton in my constituency, I found that estate agents could talk of nothing else but a real and significant upturn in the housing market, with house sales increasing and house prices improving week by week? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that reflects a steady return to confidence in this country and represents good news for Plymouth, good news for the country and bad news for the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that that is right in every aspect. I have not myself visited estate agents, as I have no intention of moving.

Q2. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Milburn: Does the Prime Minister share his Chancellor's lack of regret about the damage done to the country by his Government? Is not it time that he learned to apologise and to listen to the millions of people who have become the victims of his policies? Has he got time today to tell them what changes in direction he has planned following last week's overwhelming public rejection not only of him and his colleagues but of his Government's policies?

The Prime Minister: I have said before, and from the Dispatch Box, that I understand the difficulties that people have faced as a result of the recession. I have said that clearly. I have also made it clear that I appreciate that it has lasted longer than people anticipated, but it was necessary to bring inflation down, or inflation would have gone on wreaking ever-greater damage for an even longer period. We needed to bring it down; we have brought it down. That is the only secure basis for lasting growth in the future. The fact is that the Labour party would never have had the guts to take the decisions that were necessary.

Economy

Q3. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the state of the economy.

The Prime Minister: It is getting better every day—exports up, manufacturing output up, retail sales up, business confidence up, new housing starts up and gross domestic product up.

Mr. Brown: Is my right hon. Friend aware that that reply is confirmed in Brigg and Cleethorpes, where industrial recovery has resulted in unemployment falling to below the national average where once it was twice the national average? Will he acknowledge the Government support that has resulted in tremendous United States investment through companies such as Kimberly-Clark Ltd. and Paramount Packaging, where many jobs have been created in the last few months? May I advise my right hon. Friend that in Cleethorpes last week Allied Colloids announced that 90 more new jobs would be created?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to welcome investments such as those which represent good news for Humberside. They represent the confidence of inward investors and of British companies in the region. I know how hard my hon. Friend works for his constituents and how much he will welcome those developments.

Ms Estelle Morris: What would the Prime Minister say to the millions of pensioners living just above income support level who thought that his pledge to start listening would mean that the proposal to charge VAT on fuel would be removed?

The Prime Minister: Everyone, including the Opposition Front Bench, as I understand it, agrees that the budget deficit is too high and that we need to bring it down. We have had the courage to produce our proposals, of which VAT is a part, to bring it down. I am surprised that the hon. Lady should raise that after the nonsense talked by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) about VAT last week, when it was clear from one of his economic spokesmen that the Opposition, too, would have increased VAT on a range of items.

Engagements

Q4. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Has my right hon. Friend seen the report today that housing starts are up 22 per cent. compared with the last quarter? Should not that news bring joy even to the hearts of the dismal Johnnies on the Opposition Benches? Is not that a sign of a return to confidence?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the Opposition are unhappy at good news. They realise that good news today for us is bad news tomorrow for them. Clearly, it shows growing confidence by the building industry in the market for new houses. That is very welcome in view of the difficulties that the construction industry has had. With the measures that the Chancellor took in the autumn statement, the measures that he took in the budget and the reduction in interest rates, there is clearly a much better prospect for the housing market.

Q5. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Connarty: Does not the Prime Minister accept that the bloody nose on Thursday was given to him personally as much as to his Government? Has it improved his listening skills area on the issue of testing children? We are to have a statement later today, but the nation is looking to the Prime Minister to see where he stands. As a Scot, I remember that we went through a period of attrition when the Government tried to force testing on to our country. Thankfully, it is now back in the hands of parents and teachers who care for children, so that test items can be used whenever they want and not compulsorily. Will the Prime Minister tell the House where he stands on the testing of children and the interference of the state in the care of parents and teachers?

The Prime Minister: The answer to the first part of that supplementary question is that, of course, I accept my share of responsibility for the election results last week, in precisely the same way as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will accept his share of responsibility for losing the last election. As for education and testing, I will tell the hon. Gentleman precisely where I stand: I stand four square with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Q6. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is never popular to increase taxes but it is necessary to balance the books? Does he further agree that the responsibility of the Government contrasts sharply with that of Labour Members, who demand more spending but do not tell us how they would pay for it?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend and, as he indicated, measures are in place to bring down the size of the borrowing requirement. That has required some tough decisions, but, having concluded that that is necessary, the Government have taken those decisions knowing that they cannot be ducked. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the Labour party is in a fundamentally dishonest position—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are committed to spending money, but they will not say where the money is coming from. That is very good for an Opposition but not for a Government, which is why we remain on these Benches and they remain on the Opposition Benches.

Testing (Schools)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): With permission, Madam Speaker, I propose to make a statement about future arrangements for national curriculum testing.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have already confirmed the Government's commitment to this summer's tests for seven and 14-year-olds. There is abundant evidence of the importance of testing the progress of our children. Our main competitor countries do so as a matter of course. So should we. It would be a betrayal of a future generation of pupils—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Patten: Our main competitor countries do so as a matter of course. So should we. It would be a betrayal of a future generation of pupils to postpone what are acknowledged on all sides to be much needed educational reforms. It would be to set aside the tremendous efforts made by the great majority of hard-working teachers to implement the national curriculum since 1989.

Tests for seven-year-olds are in their third year. We know that they work. Tests in 1991 and 1992 have improved standards of teaching and learning. Last year's pilot tests for 14-year-olds were well received. Attendance by pupils actually went up on test days. Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools said only yesterday that the evidence provided by a good testing system was essential to assess the progress of our schools.

Children have been working towards the tests for several years. Abandoning the tests would leave conscientious teachers, concerned parents and the wider community in the dark about our schools, depriving them of vital information about the attainments of individual pupils and denying Sir Ron Dearing the information about the quality of the tests for which he himself has asked.

I come to the testing arrangements for 1994. Sir Ron Dearing has been given the widest possible remit. His task is to advise on how the curriculum and assessment framework in the round can be simplified and streamlined in response to the concerns of many teachers.

I have discussed with Sir Ron the implications for 1994. He has advised me that the tests next year should focus on the basics—exactly why I asked him to set up the review in the first instance. I agree with that advice. The Government have therefore decided on the following for 1994. First, mandatory tests in 1994 for seven and 14-year-olds should concentrate on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and on Welsh as a first language in Wales. We shall decide later whether to add technology at the age of 14, in the light of this summer's tests.

Secondly, the testing arrangements in these subjects will be streamlined, with some substantial changes to coverage and style. I have asked Sir Ron Dearing to advise me by July on how this can best be done, including the balance between the tests themselves and teachers' own assessments.

Thirdly, and very importantly, Sir Ron will, at my request, carefully consider the merits of external marking by external examiners of the tests of 11 and 14-year-olds.

Fourthly, the current obligation on teachers of seven-year-olds to make assessments of class room work in technology, history and geography will be lifted in 1994 and will not be introduced in music, art and physical education, allowing those teachers to concentrate on the basics.

Fifthly, next year's tests for 11-year-olds in English, mathematics and science will take the form of a national pilot, leading to mandatory tests in 1995.

Sixthly, the introduction of mandatory tests for 14-year-olds in history and geography which had been planned for 1994 will be postponed, pending Sir Ron Dearing's review.

Seventhly, to ensure that Sir Ron Dearing's recommendations about changes to the curriculum can be rapidly implemented, which is what many of my right hon. and hon. Friends want, the Government propose to suspend for a period the consultation procedures specified in sections 20 and 21 of the Education Reform Act 1988. We shall move an appropriate amendment to the Education Bill, now in another place.

This will preserve, during the interim, the duty on me and on the Secretary of State for Wales to consult about changes, but it will be designed to enable us to proceed to make those changes after a single stage of consultation in cases such as this in which the need for change has been widely recognised and the changes themselves are the product of extensive prior debate, such as that which has been going on in the country for a number of months.

I say two things in conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "I resign".] That is only to be expected from the Opposition, but I am anxious to complete my statement, Madam Speaker.

These decisions will significantly reduce the work load on teachers in 1994. It is in the interests of properly taught children, informed parents, employers and the nation that the testing arrangements which I have described today should go ahead without interruption. If they do not, we will have an education system without adequate rigour, and we shall have conceded a decade's advantage to our international competitors.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Does the Secretary of State realise that his statement illustrates the utter confusion and chaos in Government circles on this year's tests? Only yesterday, the Secretary of State was saying that there would be no further statement. No. 10 said that there would be; then it said that there would not be—little knowing, apparently, that the Lord Privy Seal and the Prime Minister had decided that the crisis of confidence in the Secretary of State was so great that he would be forced to make this statement today. Clearly, however, the reason for the statement remains puzzling, as the Secretary of State has said that there are to be no changes in the testing arrangements for this year.

The Secretary of State's statement that the tests must go ahead this year proves that he has learnt nothing and that he is still not willing to listen. Does he realise that no previous holder of his office so clearly united the independent schools with the NUT, or the Professional Association of Teachers with the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, all of which, with parents and governors of all political persuasions, are totally opposed to the Government's imposed tests?

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that no one is opposed to the testing and assessment of children but that

the tests that he wants to impose are high on administration and low on educational value, and that no one has confidence in them?

If so many changes are to be made next year and in subsequent years, why does the Secretary of State persist in trying to make guinea pigs of our children this year? The logic of his own position must be to withdraw the compulsion to have tests this year. Why cannot he make the tests voluntary? Does he consider himself to be tied by his own legislation?

With regard to testing arrangements for future years, does not the Secretary of State realise that he cannot get the arrangements right if he does not admit that he has been wrong so far and if he does not understand his own mistakes? Will he now admit that he has been wrong? Will he admit his mistakes and consult widely, and not in haste, about the arrangements for the future?

We welcome the 11 specific points on which the Secretary of State has climbed down in respect of testing arrangements for future years. Thus, it is all the more incredible that he is forcing tests on children this year.

Looking to the future, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to understand that appointments to and the terms of reference and time scale of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority are critical, that the membership of SCAA must not be determined by the Secretary of State alone, that a majority of its members must be people responsible for educating children, and that the review must be genuinely independent of the Government.

To that end, will the Secretary of State agree that the Select Committee on Education should ratify membership of the review body? Will he acknowledge that the review must not be a hasty exercise? Will he accept that, unless parents, teachers and governors have full confidence in the independence and in the appropriateness of the timing of the review, we shall not be provided with a long-term solution to this problem?

The real issue is whether the Secretary of State has demonstrated a capacity to listen and to understand the problems that he has created. He still fails that test. His obstinate and arrogant refusal to change this year's tests is incredible. He does not enjoy the confidence of parents, teachers or governors—even of his own advisers. He should resign.

Mr. Patten: I am very confused by the hon. Lady's attitude and by that of her hon. Friends, such as the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who is one of 100 lead signatories to early-day motion 1988, which says that there should be no national curriculum tests whatsoever for seven-year-olds. It is very difficult to understand the Labour party's attitude.

The reforms that have been introduced since 1988 have at each stage been modified in response to views from teachers and other professionals and educationists. That is exactly what happened with the 1991 tests for seven-year-olds. They were translated into new and improved tests for seven-year-olds for 1992. They are now being taken in many schools up and down the country, and I believe that they will show a critical improvement in standards.

Each reform should build on the preceding stage of the reform. It is critical that the tests should proceed this summer, in the interests of the children themselves. People in this country will be amazed when they see the published test questions and will wonder what on earth the fuss was about. Sir Ron Dearing, in response to my remit letter to him of several weeks ago, said—he repeated it yesterday—that he needed the evidence of this year's tests in order to inform his review.

Sometimes the Government are accused of not listening. I have been to a good number of schools up and down the land and I have talked to teachers in those schools and in my Department. They have stated their views about the national curriculum and assessment. I did listen; that is why, several weeks ago, I set up the review under Sir Ron Dearing. That was a classic case of responding, quite correctly, to professional concerns. But in the meantime, if the reforms are to succeed, they must proceed.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that my right hon. Friend will reject the ill-considered advice that he has just received from the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). Does he accept that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members and certainly parents will widely welcome his statement, which clearly shows that he has listened to parents and teachers and has simplified the national curriculum and testing? I hope that my right hon. Friend's announcement will be matched by an equivalent one from the trade unions withdrawing the boycott.

Mr. Patten: I welcome what my hon. Friend has said. The response of professional teachers will be interesting. I hope that they will respond to my statement this afternoon. It will substantially reduce teachers' work load, about which they have complained, and possibly introduce external examiners for tests at 11 and 14. I hope that teachers will welcome the reforms. No teacher should ever think that the national curriculum or testing is wrong or will not produce results in the interests of our children.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the Secretary of State accept that at least two of the things that he has said today will be widely accepted in the House—first, his recognition that the current testing arrangements impose an excessive work load on teachers in our schools and, secondly, his clear admission that the current testing arrangements are wrong and desperately need to be changed?

Does he further accept that many parents, teachers and governors will be bitterly disappointed by his statement today because, although he is offering changes in the future, he offers no changes at the present time, so the problems in our schools will continue? There is no end to the strife in our schools—strife of the Government's making. Does the Secretary of State really believe that by offering jam tomorrow he can get himself out of a pickle today?

Mr. Patten: The tests taken by any child at any stage of his or her career, be it GCSE or A-level, will always be subject to lively debate. People will often say that this or that question was not put in the right way or was flawed. It is certainly not my belief that the tests for 14-year-olds this summer are fundamentally flawed. It is a matter of professional debate.

Some people think that there are problems. Others, including professional advisers, such as the noble Lord Griffiths, who was chairman of the School Examinations and Assessment Council, do not. Lord Griffiths wrote to my on 18 April delivering the tests and saying that it was

[Mr. Patten]

the view of his council that the tests had been well prepared. After all, they had been piloted during the previous three years.

Why should the tests at 14 go ahead this summer? I shall tell the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) why. Children have been working for the tests for the past two to three years. Children have a right and an expectation that they will take the tests. The hon. Gentleman should listen to Sir Ron Dearing, the widely respected independent chairman of the review I have set up, who has asked that the tests should go ahead this summer.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be obliged if we could have brisk questions and brisk answers so that we can get through questions from a number of hon. Members.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend ask Sir Ron Dearing to ensure that arrangements are made whereby heads of department in schools, especially English and technology departments, can put their views directly to him so that, by 1994, we shall have a better system of testing in schools?

Mr. Patten: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that that has already happened. Sir Ron Dearing is consulting not only head teachers in a series of regional meetings, but a range of heads of department in exactly the way that my hon. Friend wishes.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Will the Secretary of State accept that his retreat into flexibility for next year is fatally compromised by his determination to press ahead this year? Is it possible in a free society—a society that is different from that of Napoleonic France or, dare I say it, of Nazi Germany—for professional educators to be forced to do something to which they are opposed because of educational principle? Does the Secretary of State accept that he cannot get the reforms through for this year unless he is prepared to put General Patten's tanks on every playground in the country?

Mr. Patten: I believe that it would be so sad if there were a boycott this summer of, for example, the tests for seven-year-olds which have been largely completed. That is why I profoundly hope that the NUT ballot, of which we shall have the result on Thursday, is not in favour of the boycotting of all tests at seven, 11 and 14. That would be a tragedy for our children.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): Having met head teachers and heads of departments in my constituency, I know that they do not question at all the need to test. My right hon. Friend will be aware that it is the practical application that has gone wrong. If this were a business, the people charged with responsibility for the tests would have been sacked. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that point, because those people have presumably been drawing good salaries while putting the tests together.

Mr. Patten: I am Secretary of State for Education and I accept all responsibility for education in England. I know that my hon. Friend brought a deputation of heads to the Department to see my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blatch. I welcome the fact that they accept the principle of testing. I urge my hon. Friend to urge them to recognise that, if we stop the process of reform, if we stop the national curriculum being implemented, if we stop the testing regime, if we pull up the plant and examine it for two or three years, we shall set back the whole process for a decade.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that his fall from grace has been coming for a long time? Nobody has exuded more arrogance and contempt for his colleagues than he has. He has strutted round the Dispatch Box like a puffed-up peacock on heat. Today, he has come in like a bedraggled battery hen that has laid its last egg. His intellectual elitism has overwhelmed his common sense, and the people in the country know it.

Mr. Patten: That was not so much a question as a statement, from which, as the hon. Gentleman recognises, I readily dissent.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the target of the neanderthal trade unions that have orchestrated opposition to the tests is not the flaws in the tests, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) referred, but the national curriculum itself? Would not the biggest possible betrayal of our children be to allow those trade unions to feel that they were once more in charge of education? They would preside over a lowering of standards, from which the country suffered for so many decades.

Mr. Patten: I am not sure why the national curriculum and the question whether we should have one or not has suddenly been brought back as a matter for debate. It is critical that we—like the Germans, the Japanese and the French—have a well established national curriculum. We should have had one decades ago, and it is critical not to be driven off course now.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): May I remind the Secretary of State that we are talking about the future of our nation's young people, and inform him that, in a previous capacity, I was responsible for the formulation, standardisation and application of various forms of educational testing, both for attainment and of a diagnostic nature. One of the things that we learnt at the time was that the over-application of such tests devalued them—they interefered with the education programme and were counter-productive.

Just how many of the Secretary of State's advisers have that kind of experience and take into account that kind of result or lack of result? I simply want the Secretary of State to justify his position logically, rather than coming out with the party political rhetoric to which he seems so fond of resorting. Where is the rationale, the logic? As yet, it is not in evidence. Ask the profession—those who are responsible.

Mr. Patten: Given the chance, I will.

On both the National Curriculum Council, which is concerned with curricular activities, and the School Examinations and Assessment Council, which is concerned with examination and assessment, there are six lecturers and six teachers. Each of the subject groups that has helped to set up and design the tests for

seven-year-olds and 14-year-olds has included a substantial number of teachers—I believe, an overwhelming majority of teachers. That is the straight answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I can assure my right hon. Friend that the lively debate to which he referred will continue—certainly as regards this year's tests. He will know from the views that I have expressed of my disappointment on that score. I have listened carefully to his statement and would say firmly to him that the package of measures that has been announced goes a very substantial way towards meeting the criticisms that have legitimately been made in connection with the way in which the tests should be conducted in future and as regards the content of the national curriculum.

In those circumstances, does not my right hon. Friend agree that there can be no possible justification for any attempt to disrupt and boycott in our schools this year? Does he agree that such action will not only serve to damage the education of our children—which is the most important thing—but will cause the Ron Dearing review, upon which so much depends, to get off to such a bad start as to make Ron Dearing's task almost impossible?

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I warmly welcome what he has said. Like him, I believe that industrial action and boycotting have no place in the classroom. I appeal to teachers to listen to Sir Ron Dearing and to his request for their co-operation. That is something that the teaching world owes the chairman of the independent review.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Contrary to what the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education says, the Secretary of State has almost admitted—in the most amazing statement that I have ever heard—that the tests are flawed, because he has agreed that next year they will not take place. If the tests are to continue, the education of children in our schools will be affected. Bearing in mind the fact that the vast majority of teachers, regardless of their union, are opposed to the tests, why is the right hon. Gentleman forcing ahead with them now? And what will he do when teachers boycott the tests, as they will?

Mr. Patten: Each test each year is a preparation for a test the next year, as well as being a test in itself. There has been an occasion in the history of examinations—of A-levels and O-levels and now GCSEs—when each year did not involve preparation for the next. That is why it is critical for the tests to proceed, and that is why Sir Ron Dearing has asked for exactly that to happen.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that nothing is more damaging to children than vacillation and uncertainty in their education, as in all areas of their lives, and therfore it is important to be consistent? Will he further agree that equality of opportunity is absolutely fundamental to the Government's aims for all children in education and everywhere else in their lives?

Therefore, would it not be wrong for some children to have tests and others not to have tests by some form of boycott? Is my right hon. Friend considering compiling a list of volunteers who might assist in the testing process when teachers or others involved are prepared to operate a boycott in a ruthless manner?

Mr. Patten: The whole purpose of the national curriculum and the associated testing regime is to deliver a minimum entitlement of education to all our children wherever they are and from whatever background they come. That is why it is so wrong, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) said, that there should be any boycotting in the summer. Of course, we know that the tests will proceed in a number of areas—for example, the tests will be taken in London boroughs such as Wandsworth. When the results are published and when people see what the test questions are like, they will wonder what the fuss was about in the first place.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Will the Secretary of State, as a member of a Government who know the cost of everything but the value of very little, now step back and do a simple cost-benefit analysis? It is clear to all that the testing programme is in such disarray that any diagnostic value that it might have had for Sir Ron Dearing will be absolutely worthless.

Having marshalled more opposition throughout the world of education than has ever been witnessed before, will the right hon. Gentleman consider whether there might be an enormous cost benefit to him in withdrawing his insistence on pressing ahead with the tests this year and winning back some of the good will and morale throughout the world of education without which anything that he wishes to deliver for the children of this country cannot be delivered at all?

Mr. Patten: I am sure that the 430,000 hard-working teachers in England for whom I am responsible—I am not responsible for Scotland—recognise that their efforts are warmly welcomed. Those teachers have already put in an enormous investment of time to prepare children for tests at seven and 14. It would be a tragedy if that investment were wasted.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Did my right hon. Friend notice the opinion poll the other day that showed that four out of five parents want the tests to go ahead? Does he agree that that reflects the severe concern that children have been preparing for the tests for the past three years and the important point—which the Labour party has clearly missed—that the national curriculum can be improved only if the testing goes ahead? Teachers, as professionals, have a duty to ensure that they do the best they can with the tests, so that Sir Ron Dearing and others can ensure that the problems are rectified.

Mr. Patten: No one in England and Wales will ever know whether the national curriculum is working unless there is a testing regime and the results are published. That is the only way in which we will know whether education in this country is performing at the same level as that of our international competitors such as Germany and France.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I be helpful to the Secretary of State by saying that the Government got a bloody nose in Scotland a few years ago on the issue of testing not from teachers or teachers' unions but from parents? Four out of five parents kept their children away from tests.

That parental revolt made the Government see late in the day that the best way forward was to allow teacher discretion on testing in the classroom and provide a partnership among teachers, parents and education so that

[Mr. John McFall]

the education of young people could be fruitful and go forward. Will the Secretary of State learn that lesson which the Government learned so dearly at their expense in Scotland?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the system in Scotland is different; there is no Education Reform Act, and no national curriculum is laid down by statute. The education north and south of the border is completely different.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): My right hon. Friend's restatement of the principle of testing and of curriculum form are welcome in the House and in the schools. Will my right hon. Friend confirm again that it is his longer-term intention to remove a great deal of the overweening bureaucracy that has crept into the tests and to concentrate on basics, which I welcome? If he can confirm that, his statement will be even more welcome in the House.

Mr. Patten: That is so. I am sure that that is what will come from the Dearing review. I know that my hon. Friend speaks with experience—if my memory serves me aright, 23 years as a classroom teacher—so I take his views very seriously.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Has the Secretary of State considered the cost of the astonishing proposal that the tests at 11 and 14 years of age should be externally marked? Does not that constitute an admission that for seven years we have been getting the marking of external examinations done for nothing by teachers on the cheap? Would it not be better to use that money to provide better resources in schools, particularly human resources, to enhance the quality of teaching, which is the only thing that produces better standards in education?

Mr. Patten: If the hon. Gentleman casts his mind back to a survey in England—not in Wales—in March 1992, we asked 93 education authorities whether they tested regularly up to the age of 11. Only 41 said that they did so. If teachers are saying that they have been testing all along, national testing is simply a substitute for the testing that should have been taking place throughout that time in primary and secondary schools.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend recall that I brought a delegation of head and assistant head teachers to his Department some months ago and they were delighted with the changes that our noble Friend Baroness Blatch had already introduced? I have been ringing around my constituency trying to find our how many teachers were carrying out the tests. The majority are doing so—apart from one highly politically motivated gentleman. Children in the majority of schools have taken the tests and they are being marked. Teachers said, however, that they would like the tests to be simplified next year. They will therefore be delighted with my right hon. Friend's statement.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful for that, and I am sure that in most primary schools the tests for seven-year-olds will be taken, in Lancaster as elsewhere.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The Secretary of State, in his statement and his information to hon. Members at Question Time, has shown that he has failed the listening test; secondly, that he has failed the speech test; and in his reference to the early-day motion which I tabled last night with 104 other people, he has failed the reading and understanding test. I did not say that the tests should be abandoned. That was the opinion of parents who were polled by *The Independent* and NOP. My demand was a rather modest one—for this year's tests to be made voluntary.

I cannot understand why the Secretary of State made a statement about next year, implying that this year's tests must be badly flawed and damaging for children and teachers, and yet was unable to make this year's tests voluntary. In the light of the arrangements that he is making for next year, which we admit show a considerable improvement in his attitude, does he intend not to bring any pressure on local education authorities, head teachers and governors in schools where teachers decide not to carry out the tests this year?

Mr. Patten: I have only two things to say to the hon. Gentleman. First, the Government have listened to the views of teachers and others, which is why, several weeks ago, I set up the Dearing review. Secondly, I have carefully considered early-day motion 1988 standing in the name of the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends:

"that children should be assessed but not given National Curriculum tests at seven".

That shows what the Labour party is concerned about.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can it be in order for the Ministry of Defence to make a major procurement announcement by letter and press release without informing the House of Commons first? The Minister of State for Defence Procurement has announced his decision on the landing platform helicopter carrier. He has announced that the order has gone to Kvaerner and Barrow in Furness, which has condemned Swan Hunter on Tyneside to closure with the loss of some 6,000 jobs. That is of enormous importance to the people of Tyneside and, I respectfully put it to you, Madam Speaker, it should be raised on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Shipbuilding has been carried out on the Tyne for centuries, yet we have had an announcement this afternoon that could deny shipbuilding on Tyneside a future. Is it right that a statement of such overwhelming importance to my constituents and thousands of workers on Tyneside can be slipped out without the House having the opportunity to question the Minister responsible? Is that an appropriate way for the Government to conduct their business?

Madam Speaker: I understand that the text of an answer to a question on this issue is already available to hon. Members. However, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will wish to make a submission to me in the usual way in time for tomorrow.

Water (Domestic Disconnections)

4.11 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Water Industry Act 1991 so as to remove the powers of water undertakers to disconnect residential premises in cases of non-payment of charges; to constrain the installation of pre-payment devices for the supply of water; and for connected purposes.

This is a simple Bill but one which affects the lives of every one of us. Human life on this planet is made possible by the abundance of oxygen in the air and water in the atmosphere. We share that water with all other plant and animal life. It is part of a natural cycle. From our first cup of tea in the morning it passes through us and washes over us out of the tap and down the plug hole. It rains on the fields and evaporates back into the atmosphere and the clouds.

All major legal systems of ancient and modern times have adopted the principle that there can be no ownership of running water; it has to be shared as a genuinely common asset. It therefore cannot be right that a water company, contracted only to clean and deliver this asset, can say, "This bit of water is ours. You have not paid for it, so we shall not let you have any."

Thankfully, in Britain many key services are still available to all, withdrawal of which is not used as a threat for non-payment. We do not say that people cannot call an ambulance or the police, send their children to school or even have their dustbins emptied if they are late paying their income tax or rates. Water should take its place alongside those core services, which are basic to our quality of life. This Bill does just that.

Action needs to be taken urgently, because the scale of water disconnections is startling. From a figure of 7,600 in 1990-91, it has leapt to 21,300 last year. Unexpectedly, Ofwat has chosen today to release this year's figures. They show a welcome reduction of 12 per cent., to 18,600. But that still means that, for every working day last year, 70 homes in this country were, in effect, rendered unfit for human habitation, according to the Housing Act 1985.

The Act is absolutely clear: section 604 says that a dwelling house is fit for habitation unless it fails to meet one or more requirements, one of which is that it has an adequate piped supply of wholesome water. Each disconnection leaves a premises unsafe as a place to work according to the Factories Act 1961 and the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963. For 2·5 million people, however, their main place of paid work is the home, not to mention the millions more who toil away every day at the kitchen sink.

Every disconnection also renders a house an unfit place in which to care for children or for old people, according to the care regulations set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Registered Homes Act 1984. We should also remember that the most common location of accidents that require hospital treatment is the home.

I am not suggesting that the process of delivery of adequate supplies of clean, pure water should not be paid for. It should be regarded as a valuable resource to be carefully used.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked a question about disconnections on 8 March, and the Government made a distinction between "can't

[Mrs. Helen Jackson]

payers" and "won't payers". They said that they offer safeguards against disconnection for those who cannot pay, and presented the vision of victims of water disconnection being obstinate, middle-class citizens with a couple of cars in the drive and sprinklers on the lawn, who wilfully refused to pay the water companies their reasonable dues. It is not like that.

Evidence around the country reveals that the victims of disconnection are people with other debts as well, who are often on income support. Yes, they pay up when faced with the nightmare of being without water, but they do so simply by getting further into debt with someone else.

There is no evidence that the threat of disconnection is what persuades people to pay their water rates. The number of unpaid bills was lower when disconnection was not the practice and bills were paid, along with the rates, on a property value basis. In Scotland, where it is illegal to disconnect water supplies, the courts are used as the final solution. That system works well.

The Government, through the regulator Ofwat, should give fresh consideration to introducing a simplified charging system that makes use of council tax banding. They should work with the Benefits Agency and the local authorities to produce easier payment schemes. That would be a more effective means of reducing non-payment.

It is for that reason that the Bill has received widespread help and backing from national consumer associations, the citizens advice bureaux, local authorities, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, housing organisations including Shelter, the Institute of Housing, the House-Builders Federation and the National Federation of Housing Associations, architects, public health officers and the Institute of Environmental Health Officers.

Those health officers have offered their backing out of a real concern for public health. I welcome the fact that, today, the chief medical officer has recognised that concern and has set up a small working group to consider the potential problems that water disconnections might cause.

I should like to quote from the environmental health officer of Canterbury city council—it is not a Labour authority, but we did very well, thank you, in the county elections on Thursday—who has written a report recommending a statutory ban on the disconnection of domestic dwellings. He states:

"The public health movement began in the last century and its major thrust at that time was to control epidemics of infectious disease . . . Our homes are all designed to make hygiene a matter of normal routine; we all expect an inside WC, a bath, wash hand basin . . . As soon as the water supply is cut off, hygiene becomes virtually impossible and the resulting 'insanitary' conditions can easily and quickly facilitate the growth of bacteria which cause disease".

We cannot take our public health for granted. At a time when the increase in notifications of water-borne diseases, such as dysentery, is causing great concern, Parliament could do one small thing to help by approving the Bill.

It is part of the Government's role to set and oversee standards relating to the quality of our lives. They must take the responsibility, along with Ofwat, to act urgently to reduce the number of water disconnections to domestic dwellings. But I say that even one disconnection is one too many and cannot be condoned. The practice must cease altogether.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mr. Richard Burden, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. John McFall, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Bill Michie, Mr. Brian Wilson, Mr. Rhodri Morgan and Mr. Malcolm Chisholm.

Water (Domestic Disconnections)

Mrs. Helen Jackson accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Water Industry Act 1991 so as to remove the powers of water undertakers to disconnect residential premises in cases of non-payment of charges; to constrain the installation of pre-payment devices for the supply of water; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 May, and to be printed. [Bill 194.]

Orders of the Day

Finance (No. 2) Bill

Considered in Committee [*Progress, 22 April*]

[MR. GEOFFREY LOFTHOUSE *in the Chair*]

Clause 183

ABOLITION OF PRT FOR OIL FIELDS WITH DEVELOPMENT CONSENTS ON OR AFTER 16TH MARCH 1993

4.21 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 21, page 137, line 32, at end insert—

'(aa) for which notice has been served that this is a non taxable field under Schedule 1 to the Principal Act: and'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient also to discuss the following amendments:

No. 22, page 137, line 32, at end insert—

'(aaa) for which no determination under Schedule 1 to the Principal Act has been made either in whole or in part as a non taxable field and'.

No. 45, page 137, line 34, leave out '16th March 1993' and insert

'such day as the Secretary of State may appoint by order, which shall be made by Statutory Instrument and shall be laid before and approved by the House of Commons'.

No. 24, page 137, line 35, leave out subsection (b).

No. 40, page 137, line 36, at end insert

'or—

(c) one in which in whole or in part, a commitment to a programme of Exploration and Appraisal drilling was undertaken under the terms of a licence agreement and approved by the Secretary of State before that date, where the field participants elect to so classify the oil field and to accept a diminishing percentage of allowable expenditure on exploration and appraisal to be offset against PRT and a ceiling on the amount allowed for each company as allowable expenditure for PRT relief; the percentage, the timescale and the ceiling to be determined by the Secretary of State and approved by the affirmative resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

No. 25, page 137, line 39, leave out subsection (2).

No. 42, page 137, line 41, leave out '16th March 1993' and insert

'the day appointed by the Secretary of State in subsection (1)(a) above'.

No. 43, page 138, line 1, leave out '16th March 1993' and insert

'the day appointed by the Secretary of State in subsection (1)(a) above'.

No. 28, page 138, line 11, leave out subsection (b).

No. 35, line 138, line 29, leave out subsection (e).

No. 29, page 138, line 35, leave out subsection (6).

No. 44, page 138, line 36, leave out '16th March 1993' and insert

'the day appointed by the Secretary of State in subsection (1)(a) above'.

No. 31, page 138, line 42, leave out subsection (7).

No. 32, page 138, line 44, leave out 'permanent' and insert 'any'.

No. 33, page 139, line 1, leave out paragraph (b).

No. 34, page 139, leave out lines 3 to 5.

Mr. Darling: The amendments concern the Government's proposals for the taxation of North sea oil and gas. Our amendments are designed to delay, or to provide for phasing in, the Government's proposals. We oppose the principle of the proposals for reasons that I shall set out, but the amendments would allow the Government to delay and, therefore, provide some transitional protection if the fiscal regime were to change so that petroleum revenue tax, both the tax and its allowances, was abandoned. The remaining and consequential clauses in this part of the Bill also have far-reaching effects and we will return to them later in Committee.

However, the amendments are also designed to draw the Government on what exactly is their strategy for oil taxation and energy policy—if they have one—and what calculations were taken into account when the Chancellor made his proposals. It should be illuminating not only for the Committee and the industry but, I suspect, for the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Office, as the Treasury proposals seem to have taken them completely by surprise.

We should remind ourselves of the importance of North sea oil to the country. Without it, the country would be bankrupt. So far, 11 billion barrels have been recovered, 7 million are under production or development and a further 7·5 million are in potential developments that are known about. It is also estimated that between 4 billion and 25 billion barrels of North sea oil and gas have yet to be discovered, some of it in very difficult conditions. It is further estimated that we have between 15 and 50 years of self-sufficiency, again an important matter, and the position with regard to gas is similar, with between 20 and 50 years of self-sufficiency.

These matters are crucial when assessing the role of taxation in our overall energy strategy so that we can maximise our exploitation of this natural resource, not least because of the United Kingdom's severe balance of payments problem. We should also remember that this issue is of national importance. United Kingdom continental shelf sales in 1992 amounted to £7·7 billion —in 1984 they had been £20 billion. In 1992, they contributed 1·2 per cent. of GNP and the annual investment of £5 billion to £6 billion represents 25 per cent. of manufacturing capacity—another formidable statistic.

It is estimated that the Government's proposals will mean that manufacturing investment in the North sea will fall between £1 billion and £2 billion and it is further estimated that there will be a loss of tax revenue of between £2 billion and £4 billion over the next five years and possibly £6 billion over a 10-year period. There is no doubt that there will be a reduction in activity in the North sea.

The Ernst and Young survey of the industry is illuminating. It found that all respondents expect the number of wells drilled in the United Kingdom sector to decrease. A clear majority of those surveyed said that the attractiveness of the United Kingdom for future investment had diminished, and exploration was expected to decrease as a result of the Budget. That is the majority of people involved in the North sea and other United Kingdom sectors. Virtually all respondents expected a decline in the number of personnel working in the United Kingdom offshore industry. That is something which no Government can afford to ignore, especially as we have just heard that if the Swan Hunter yard closes another 6,000 people will join the dole queue.

[Mr. Darling]

The Committee will know that there has been a mixed reaction to the Government's proposals. We oppose them for three reasons. First and most important, there is a substantial risk that companies will take their new-found profits and invest them abroad. There is no guarantee that the profits that the companies now have will be invested in the United Kingdom sector. Secondly, the traumatic disruption caused to the industry by the suddenness of the Chancellor's announcement will mean that between 10,000 and 30,000 jobs will go. Some of those jobs are of great technical and economic importance and many may be lost for ever. Thirdly, there is no evidence that the Government have any strategy for oil and gas, just as we know that they have none for the coal industry.

We should also bear in mind that much of the future development is likely to be high risk and high cost. Some of the oil finds yet to be explored lie to the west of the Shetlands, in difficult waters. Others are in the Rockall basin, and present formidable challenges in retrieval. Some will be small and will not pay PRT, but, taken together, they could be viable provided that we get the taxation framework right.

I want to look at the Government's position to assess their case for making the change. Their position is a simple and familiar one—the Chancellor was strapped for cash. He desperately needed every penny that he could get. The Chancellor's strategy is a short-term, some would say very short-term, one. Indeed, some unkind people say that the only Chancellorship that he will have in July is that of the Duchy of Lancaster, in charge of the citizens charter—the ultimate humiliation for any Cabinet member.

Even on a charitable view, the Chancellor's calculations appear to have spanned three or four years, rather than the three or four-Government period that is the normal time span for the industry. The Government looked at what has happened with PRT over the recent past and their attention was drawn, not unreasonably, to the fact that they have been repaying PRT over the past two or three years. Instead, they should have looked at what has happened over the past 10 years, because the picture is rather different.

PRT receipts peaked in 1984-85 at about £12 billion because of high production and high oil prices. However, in 1991-92, revenues plummeted to £1 billion, due to the amount of eligible cost being claimed, and a net £200 million of PRT was refunded. I understand that the Minister may be about to tell us that the figure has escalated to £900 million so as to make his proposals more acceptable. However, we know that £200 million was refunded, whereas, in that period, the Government received only £50 million in PRT receipts.

Why did that happen? The Government have conveniently ignored the fact that between 1988 and 1992 two significant events, which must be considered, occurred. First, the Government and the industry were anxious to stimulate production, incurring high exploration appraisal costs. According to the Government's Brown Book—the annual assessment of what is happening in the North sea—a record number of wells were drilled in 1991-92. It says:

"During 1992, a total of 131 exploration and appraisal wells were drilled. Although this was 55 fewer than in the previous year, it should be remembered that 1991 saw the third highest level of drilling activity since exploration began in 1964. Exploration success has increased to a rate of 25 per cent., with 20 significant offshore discoveries being announced during the year, 4 more than in 1991."

It is not surprising that the allowances claimable by the industry increased. Equally, it is not surprising that in the past two or three years the picture has not appeared as attractive as it did in the previous 10 years.

The second factor that we have to consider is that the industry is still reeling from the Piper Alpha disaster which had virtually stopped production. Since then, substantial claims have had to be made in order to implement the Cullen recommendations.

At a time when the PSBR is forecast to hit £50 billion, abolishing exploration and appraisal relief seems attractive at first sight. The Government's £700 million gain claimed by the Chancellor arises as a result not of increased tax revenues, but of allowances that will not be claimed. The gain is based on exploration and appraisal and that may never take place because of the Government's proposals.

The £700 million claimed by the Government, by which the Minister will set some store, is disputed by many in the industry and outside. Wood Mackenzie, which has a formidable reputation as a commentator on the industry, suggests that the total might be nearer £115 million. Whatever it is, and even if we split the difference between the Government and Wood Mackenzie, the gain to the Government has to be set off against the cost of losing jobs in the industry. If the total is anything like 20,000, the Government have a formidable loss, not just in tax revenues forgone—most of those working in the industry are well paid—but in the cost of maintaining them on the dole.

The Government ought to look at the PRT for the past 10 years. They must bear in mind that much of the future North sea investment will be in technically difficult areas. Production is set to rise in the middle of the decade, but many future discoveries will be in difficult areas.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the principal object of any tax is to raise revenue to pay for public services? What does he think the revenue would have been from the tax had the Government not proposed the changes that we are discussing this afternoon?

Mr. Darling: It is clearly difficult to predict the future rate of PRT because we do not know what will be discovered. Clearly, even with all the allowances, if oilfields do not pay PRT because it does not fall to be paid, it will be difficult to make projections of how much will be paid.

If the whole PRT regime is abandoned, first the scope for the Government levying a tax on large profits is gone, and, secondly, the allowances that are available under the PRT regime are no longer available which is a discouragement to companies to consider potentially large fields in difficult areas, as they will have to meet the entire cost of exploration and appraisal work, while at the moment they can claim substantial set-off.

The PRT regime provides the taxpayer with a potential gain, depending on what is found and a number of other factors, but it also provides a useful framework to ensure that development continues.

The hon. Gentleman raised a fundamental question which I shall address in a moment, but first I shall give way to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is not the problem that the Government have removed their previous achievement of a stable regime in the North sea? The hon. Gentleman is making a reasonable point. Abolishing PRT removes the automatic regulator if the price goes up. No oil company in the world believes that the Government would not change the tax regime without consultation just as quickly and just as negatively as they have this time.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman makes two important points. First, everyone to whom I have spoken in the oil industry, including those who have said publicly that they were in favour of the Government's proposals, freely admits that if the North sea sector started making large profits, in the middle of the decade for example, no Government of whatever colour would stand back and forgo the opportunity to raise money if the alternative was, for example, extending VAT to children's clothes or food or something else dear to the hearts of Conservative Members, such as raising income tax or taxation generally.

The hon. Gentleman's second point is equally important. The PRT regime was developed during the Conservative Government of 1970-74. It was implemented by the Labour Government in 1975 and it has been maintained, by and large, with cross-party support—although certainly with many adjustments—between then and the present time. It was then suddenly changed, without warning even to the Government's main energy Department, if one can call the Department of Trade and Industry such a thing—I am pleased to note that the Minister for Energy has at last turned up to listen to the debate—which is a major departure from normal practice.

I do not argue that the Government should consult every time they make tax changes—for obvious reasons—but when one considers the importance of the North sea and the United Kingdom continental shelf to the country's economy, it seems madness for the Government to embark on a course of action that could jeopardise the future of the North sea for this country.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) raised an important matter. There is a legitimate public debate about whether the public ought to subsidise, encourage or shield companies from the risk of exploration. It is a legitimate debate, but the Government have not yet joined it. There is an argument that companies should shoulder the whole risk themselves; equally, there is an argument that we should not throw away a tax regime that provides a subsidy—a shield, if you like—for the risks. It is important that the Government look after the United Kingdom's strategic interests in ensuring that we maximise the natural resource that we have in the United Kingdom continental shelf sector for as long as possible.

There is no point in denying that the changes will prolong the life of some existing fields. The Government have a point on that. There is equally no doubt that some incremental development around fields is becoming more attractive—there have been announcements in the past couple of days saying just that—but when one considers the effect of abolishing cross-field allowance and the change to the tariff receipt regime, it is by no means clear that incremental development will be as attractive.

In any event, in case the Minister is tempted to pray in aid the BP announcement yesterday and the Shell announcement about a month ago, I should mention that both developments were planned some time ago. Oil companies cannot announce major developments the day after the Chancellor has made an announcement.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that Dr. Gibson-Smith, the BP exploration chief executive, was telling an untruth when he said yesterday that the new BP developments were

"made more likely as a consequence of the Budget changes to Petroleum Revenue tax"?

Those are not my words, but the words of the man in charge of exploration at BP.

Mr. Darling: Of course I am not suggesting that he is telling an untruth. What the gentleman said is that these developments became more likely. Is the Minister suggesting that in Shell people suddenly got up one morning and said, "Right, let's go ahead with this development"? They were considering it for some time and looked at all the sums. Then there was the fiscal change, and they said, "Yes, this is a great advantage." To say that had it not been for the Government changes nothing would have happened would be absolute nonsense. What the representatives of Shell were saying is entirely consistent.

Mr. Dorrell: I think the hon. Gentleman said that Shell was thinking about it before the Budget, that there were fiscal changes and that, following the fiscal changes, Shell decided to go ahead with it. Is that the hon. Gentleman's position?

Mr. Darling: It may surprise the hon. Gentleman to learn that, unlike some of his colleagues, I have no direct interests in the oil industry. I was not at the Shell board meeting when these matters were discussed, nor was I privy to its consideration; but it is entirely likely that Shell has been considering this matter for some time. These developments cannot be worked up from scratch. Of course changes are taken into account. I hope that the Minister will concede that other companies would have gone ahead with work that is now less attractive because of the petroleum revenue tax change, which will have a damaging effect.

I may be wrong, but I think that the Minister for Energy was nodding when I made my preliminary remark that these schemes were not just dreamt up after 16 March. I do not understand the point that the Minister is making. He seems to be making a great deal out of nothing in particular.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Human nature being what it is, would not it be reasonable to suppose that the companies that will gain large sums of money—we are talking about tens and, perhaps in some cases, hundreds of millions of pounds—from tax changes might believe that they are a good idea?

Mr. Darling: That is self-evident. I noticed a flurry of announcements yesterday. It is hardly surprising that BP, Shell and other companies are happy about the proposals. As I shall develop shortly, the changes mean that they have the money in their pockets and they will decide where to spend it; we might want to consider the implications of that.

Mr. Tim Smith: We should not object if they have the money in their pockets and decide where to spend it.

Mr. Darling: From a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. He claims that we should have no objection if companies have all this money in their pockets and decide where to spend it. He is right up to a point. From the point of view of the oil companies, that argument is overwhelming, but from the point of view of the United Kingdom, the Government and the people, surely we are entitled to ask ourselves whether we want a tax regime that runs a substantial risk of investment being exported to other parts of the world at the expense of a resource which we have in this country. Every Government, of whatever colour, have used the tax regime to maximise the resources available to them. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is wrong—possibly he still belongs to the rump of the Conservative party that believes in that system—that is fine, but it is not a view which we take.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who is muttering from a sedentary position, seems to forget that it was the Chancellor who said that the objective of the changes in the PRT was to raise revenue for the Government. It is the hon. Gentleman's Government who are attacking them.

Mr. Tim Smith: We do not want to tax people.

Mr. Hughes: He says that they do not want to tax people. The Government are caught on two hooks. On the one hand, they do not want to admit that they are applying the tax; on the other, they are trying to pretend that it is our fault that it is being done.

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield seemed to take the view that it is best to give as much money as possible to the companies, which will decide what to do with it. That is statable case, but there is an overarching, strategic view that the Government have to take on behalf of the people.

No doubt it would find favour in most parts of the Committee if I said that companies might be encouraged to search for large fields under the new system, whereas they might have been less enthusiastic under the old. Although they are no longer protected from exploration and appraisal costs, the risks might be high, but the gain would be immense. I dare say the Government will seek to argue that.

The only point that must be made is that when an oil company looks for oil, it does not know what it will find. In many cases, oil companies have gone into areas where they thought the field might be small and have discovered that it was much larger than expected. The argument is that they would not have gone looking in the small field if protection had not been afforded by the PRT regime.

In an excellent report on the impact of the changes on the Grampian economy published a few days ago, Professor Kemp of Aberdeen university said:

> "For new exploration and development activities the tax system facing investors is simply the corporation tax at 33 per cent. By world standards this is unique for a major petroleum producing province. Unfortunately there is no guarantee that this situation will be permanent and the political risk of further changes must be quite high."

The oil companies realise that, but it is interesting that Professor Kemp considers that the low tax barrier is unique. I suggest that the reason is that many countries take the view that there must be some fiscal incentive to go into difficult areas and, therefore, keep oil companies operating in a sector over which they have control, but if profits arise on a large scale, the taxpayer must be entitled to a fair share of them.

There is every prospect that some large oil companies will pocket their windfall gain and reinvest it elsewhere. We must bear in mind that we are in competition with many parts of the world. Substantial oil reserves are known to exist in the CIS, off south America and in the far east. Even in the United States, a high-cost country where profits are equally high, there are reserves as yet unrecovered.

4.45 pm

Boardrooms are bound to take a broad view about where it is best to go. The North sea is a high-cost centre. If companies have the cash in hand, they will not have to invest it in the North sea; they can go elsewhere. Therefore, Britain will in effect be subsidising exploration in other parts of the world. To a large extent, the PRT system locked oil companies into the United Kingdom sector. Ultimately we will become an oil importer, but I see no reason to hasten that day.

The Government will also no doubt argue that oil companies were engaged in a spate of drilling where prospects were poor. However, given that the North sea is a mature field and that many new prospects are in difficult areas, that argument does not hold much strength. The other point that ought to be made is that in 1992 the success rate of drilling was 1:3·6, which is high for the industry.

I do not believe that the Government's case is proved. There is substantial doubt about the claims. I accept that over the last week, and particularly in the week following the Budget, good news was announced by companies that have prayed in aid the Government's changes, but, taken overall, there is a substantial risk that companies will be tempted to invest their profits in other parts of the world.

The position of the oil companies has to be covered. The position of the industry rather depends on whom one speaks to. Naturally, BP is laughing all the way to the bank, if not to other parts of the world. An examination of its most recent annual report is illuminating. When it deals with potential profit centres it says, among other things:

> "In the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian sea we are part of a consortium which has a 20 per cent. interest in the Azeri field where about 1·8 billion barrels of recoverable oil are thought to exist."

Off Vietnam, it has started an extensive exploration drilling programme; in South Africa, it is investing in a refinery, and it is expanding in eastern Europe. There is nothing wrong with that.

It is good to see a British company doing all that and I would not want to discourage it, but hitherto there has been an incentive for many companies to stay in the North sea and to carry on drilling in sometimes difficult areas. If a company has the money in hand and has a choice between going to a high-risk, high-cost area or to an area where costs and risks are less, it might choose the cheaper option. I would not argue that one should seek to hold oil companies in an area that they would not want to be in. I do not think that anyone would argue that in regard to the North sea, but, again, I stress my doubt about our throwing away the incentive that we have.

It is not surprising that BP is pleased. Like the Government, it was strapped for cash last year and its tax bill has been cut by about £140 million. Nor is it surprising

that it has been keen to encourage its colleagues in the oil industry not to complain, and to join the Government in praising the Chancellor's announcement. Shell has also joined forces with BP in announcing developments. Those developments were not planned recently.

While some companies say that new investment will be encouraged, others say privately that since 16 March two things have happened which we should consider. First, the fiscal and political stability which they have valued in the North sea regime—a point made by the hon. Member for Gordon—has gone. It was of great importance and should not have been lightly thrown away. Secondly, the traumatic shock caused by the Chancellor's announcement may make many people in boardrooms, often in the United States with no direct interest in this country, look long and hard at the future of the North sea and decide that future investment lies elsewhere. As I have said, we are in competition with other parts of the world and the Chancellor may have provided the jolt which will provoke some companies to go elsewhere. Equally, for some oil companies the Government's proposals are disastrous, depending on how they were placed.

What about the supply industry? Exploration and appraisal work will decrease. In some cases, exploration will cost about four times more than in the past. Every oil company has said that exploration work will reduce. Indeed, already supply companies in the north-east of Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom have started to indicate to their work forces that they will be laid off. More than that, many companies entered into obligations with the Government based on an existing tax regime which has been changed.

I am glad that we have on the Treasury Bench both the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Minister for Energy. Perhaps they will share with us the difference of opinion that is apparent between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry. Press reports suggest that the DTI regards some of the obligations that companies have entered into as being legally binding, while the Treasury does not. Which is correct? It is crucial for them to say which obligations they regard as legally binding. Oil companies may test the point, but it would be useful to know Government thinking on the subject.

It is also worth bearing in mind that there were changes not only to the petroleum revenue tax but to the cross-field allowance regime, which has made any incremental developments attractive to the tariff receipt allowance, which discouraged the profusion of pipes across the North sea and which, as a result of its obligation, may skew the market—for example, in respect of offshore loading—in a way that is not altogether desirable.

The position of the United Kingdom in terms of the taxpayer and the economy should be at the forefront of the Government's consideration. The Government are proposing to abandon what is essentially a profits tax. Moreover, as I have said, they are abandoning a mechanism for locking oil companies into the North sea sector, which is a high-risk and difficult area. Indeed, we may have provided an incentive for them to go elsewhere, so our fundamental concern must be about where the money will be spent.

Will the companies keep the new profits, invest them in the North sea or take them elsewhere? We are also giving up future tax revenues—some say, on a conservative estimate, of up to £6 billion over the next 10 years. The balance of payments—an issue of great concern, given the fact that it is in desperate straits at the height of a recession—will not be helped if we start importing oil or gas.

The effect on jobs must come into our consideration of the whole issue. The Government—it is not usual for them to concede that anything they do costs jobs—have on this occasion conceded that up to 10,000 jobs will go. In his study, Professor Kemp says that between 7,000 and 11,000 jobs may go in the United Kingdom. Others have put the estimate as high as 30,000.

Considering that it costs £9,000 to keep a person on the dole and that most of the people about whom we are speaking are well paid, the cost to the Exchequer of losing those jobs would, I believe, exceed the savings likely to occur as a result of scrapping the petroleum revenue tax regime.

It is nonsense for the Treasury to look at the issue from one aspect. It considers that it will save perhaps £700 million by scrapping PRT. On the other hand, the Department of Social Security will have to pick up the tab, and it is clear—north American experience, where a similar state of affairs existed a few years ago, bears this out—that once those people have been lost, their valuable skills will not easily be recovered.

We are speaking not simply of people working on North sea oil rigs. There is a great deal of onshore activity involving geologists, physicists and people in the support industries, all of whom are highly skilled and highly paid and who contribute substantially to the nation's economy. We run the risk of losing some of them from the industry, while others will go abroad and will be lost to the country for ever. There is the additional problem that some companies may be tempted not just to cut back on exploration appraisal but to cut down on safety.

Most people accept that at some point there must be a change in the taxation regime. The North sea oil sector is mature and it has been obvious that the PRT regime must be adjusted and perhaps one day brought to an end. But this is not the time to do that, for the reasons I have given. With oil prices expected to remain low for 10 years or so, there is a limit to how much can be taken from what is essentially a windfall profits tax.

The Government should bear five points in mind. First, the PRT system should not be scrapped now. There is scope for adjusting the rate of the tax and the rate of allowances that can be claimed. There is a case for capping the allowances. All such moves would be possible under our amendment, and we shall develop those themes when we debate later clauses. The amendment would allow the phasing in of transitional relief, and if the Government are not prepared to concede the principle, they should accept that transitional relief would be of great benefit to the industry, onshore and offshore.

Secondly, the Government might consider abolishing the royalties that still exist for pre-1983 fields. That might provide assistance. Thirdly, the issue of speculative drilling could be dealt with through the licensing regime because it is for the Government to decide where companies go, because they grant the licences.

Fourthly, the way in which exploration and appraisal allowances are granted could be adjusted. For example, allowances could be given on the basis of part now and part after five years or so. The Government could take all sorts of measures to make the allowances more attractive to companies, while balancing those measures with the legitimate interest of the Treasury in recovering funds.

Fifthly, we could examine the cross-field and tariff allowance scheme. Sixthly, as I said, if the Government are determined to abandon PRT at this stage—although they would be wrong to do so—they must look carefully at the question of transitional relief, and our amendment would provide for that.

There is no doubt that the Government announcement has caused a major dramatic disruption to North sea activity. Transitional relief is a subject to which we shall return when we debate later clauses, perhaps after the Government have had a chance to reflect on what has been said. The Chancellor's record of forecasting and making financial judgments is appalling. There is no evidence to suggest that his knowledge of geology is any better or that his knowledge of what is happening in the North sea can be relied on.

North sea oil and gas are among this country's few natural resources that remain to be exploited. We are in competition with the rest of the world. Other countries are desperate for industry and are willing to provide incentives to get oil companies to go there, especially for the economic gains that can accrue.

Hon. Members in all parts of the Committee, and the Government in particular, must reflect on those issues before throwing away a regime which, by all-party consent, has served the nation well. We have an opportunity tonight to ask the Government to take stock, to coin a phrase. It would be a tragedy if North sea oil were to become another casualty of the Chancellor's poor judgment.

Mr. Tim Smith: The changes proposed by the Government have my full support. That applies to their substance and timing. My hon. Friends should not be in the slightest surprised that Labour Members are attached to an 83 per cent. tax rate, since that was the top rate of income tax in 1979. They like high tax rates. They like taking money out of people's pockets and spending it on their behalf. That applies as much to oil companies as to individuals.

That was the basis of the case made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), who believes that the Government are in a better position than the oil companies to make investment decisions. I take the opposite view. I believe in low business taxes because with low taxes—the standard corporation tax rate has been reduced from 52 to 33 per cent. in the last 14 years—investment is attracted to the United Kingdom. Indeed, that is why there has been an increase in inward investment. That applies as much to North sea oil as to business generally. Low business taxes are good. Not surprisingly, Opposition Members such as the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) support high business taxes.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I am curious about the hon. Gentleman's introductory remarks. He criticises Opposition Members for apparently wishing to raise taxes. Is he not aware that the measure that he is defending will have the effect of raising taxes?

5 pm

Mr. Smith: I shall come to that. It will raise more tax, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that when the Conservatives have reduced the rate of income tax, the yield has risen. We do not find that surprising because high taxes are a disincentive to people to produce more income. I shall establish during my remarks that, as a result of the changes that we propose, more income and more revenue will be generated.

I remind the Committee that we are discussing a revenue tax and not a profits tax, although the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central continually referred to the latter. More revenue will be generated from the North sea, with the result that the yield from petroleum revenue tax will rise. The large oil companies, which the hon. Gentleman went out of his way to attack, will invest more in existing fields.

Not surprisingly, the oil companies hold on their shelves a number of prospective development projects whose economic viability turns on the oil price at a particular time and on the fiscal regime at that time. We were told by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that the oil price is not likely to rise over the next 10 years—it is nice to have his forecast. If that is correct, these projects would have continued not to be economically viable, but because of the Budget changes they will now be viable and the revenue from existing fields in which Shell, BP and Esso have already invested heavily will rise further—as will the revenue from PRT.

The hon. Gentleman says that the result of all this will be that the profits are invested abroad. I believe that much of the money will be invested in new production in existing fields where there is a great deal of marginal capacity yet to be exploited—rather more than there is in the prospective fields on the edge of the North sea, which are often in much deeper water and it would cost much more to extract the oil from them. I concede that they may hold reserves, but the cost of extracting those reserves would be much higher. It makes a great deal of sense, therefore, to go for the reserves in the existing fields, from which the oil can be extracted with relative ease.

We need the change of regime to respond to changes in the North sea. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central says that we have had a stable regime for many years. In the next breath he claims that the North sea is now mature and concedes that changes must be made. The only issue at stake is one of timing. I think that this is the right time while he does not.

Now is the right time, too, because there has been a large fall in the price of oil. Of course it was right, 10 years ago when the oil price was much higher in real terms, to have a high marginal rate of PRT, but times change. In respect both of the greatly reduced oil price and of what the hon. Gentleman describes as the maturity of the North sea, the change is timely——

Mr. Salmond: Let us imagine that the oil price does not go along with the forecast given by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and sharply increases in the near future. Does the hon. Gentleman think it likely that any Government, regardless of political colour, would leave in place only corporation tax, faced with large windfall profits to be made from the North sea? Does he think it likely that any Government, regardless of political colour, would leave in place only corporation tax, faced with large windfall profits to be made from the North sea? If he thinks it likely, he will find that few people in the industry will believe it—given the circumstances of the early 1980s, when a Government headed by Baroness Thatcher increased the taxation regime left them by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that all Governments claim to be putting in place stable tax regimes, but they all modify them according to changed circumstances, such as I am describing. The oil price has dropped, so it makes sense to change the regime in line with what the Treasury proposes.

Perhaps the best reason of all—I think that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central just about conceded it—is that we raise taxes to pay for public services, even though no one likes paying them. It is nonsensical to keep a tax that involves either no yield, as it did last year, or a repayment of tax to taxpayers, as it did the year before. It is not sensible to continue with such a regime for long and it must be right to change it so that the tax is abolished or at least yields some revenue for the Treasury.

Moreover, the higher the rate of tax and the higher the allowances, the more economic distortions result. It is good if we can bring tax rates down, because it is much better for industry and commerce generally if investment decisions are made on their merits—on the likely yield from the investment—and not purely for tax reasons. I fear that in the North sea recently exploration companies have been making investment decisions principally for tax reasons, and that cannot be right.

What we need and will now have is a broader tax base, with lower rates and lower allowances. The ultimate example of that is the abolition of the tax altogether, which is what will happen with the new fields.

Of course there will be a change in the balance in favour of production and against exploration, but that makes a great deal of sense in the circumstances.

I understand the anxieties about the transitional arrangement. Such arrangement are always of critical importance as we move from one tax regime to another. The difficulty with the proposals in this respect is that a considerable cost would be involved, and it could be dealt with, as I think the amendments recognise, only by increasing the PRT rate. If one believes that a tax change is right and will benefit the United Kingdom economy and the North sea oil sector, it must be right to make this tax change straight away, which is why I support both the substance and the timing of the changes.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The debates on this subject so far took place before the events of last Thursday—the Government débâcle in the county council elections in England and the disastrous result for the Tory candidate in Newbury. Since then, we understand that the order has gone out from No. 10 Downing street that Ministers should be more caring and more listening. We wait to see whether the message has got through to the Financial Secretary.

Since the Second Reading debate, the discussion has moved on and some inconsistencies in the Government's approach have appeared. Winding up on Second Reading, the Financial Secretary admitted that there had been no discussions with the oil industry. He defended that in the following terms:

"I will comment on the proposition that there should be consultation with the industry. It seems to be a rather odd proposition that, before a Government consider raising tax, they must engage in consultations to give notice of their intentions so that the industry can bring forward its activity to take advantage of the tax system that we are seeking to remove."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1993; Vol. 223, c. 818.]

He still refused to say what discussions had taken place with the DTI or the Scottish Office, or what advice he had received.

On the face of it, that would seem a reasonable defence. However, the Minister took a different tack when giving an interview last week to Robin Chrystal for the *Press and Journal (Aberdeen)*. If the article is incorrect, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will tell me so:

"In a bullish mood the Minister chided offshore companies which have complained about the change. 'They should have seen it coming,' he said."

Later, the Minister all but ruled out any change,

"as he revealed that civil servants had been working on reforming the PTR regime for the last three and a half years."

In my innocence, I believed what the Financial Secretary said in the earlier debate, thinking that he had got his proposals wrong because he had not had time to think them through or to work out their effects on sections of the industry. Now we are told that the changes have been worked on for three and a half years.

It certainly seems to be implied that the industry was party to the discussions. The Minister seems to be shaking his head, but if the industry was not party to the discussions, how could it have foreseen the changes?

Mr. Dorrell: My point was that this is a sophisticated industry which employs a large number of sophisticated tax advisers. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to work out that a tax system costing the Exchequer money is not one that will last for much longer.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister seems to be saying that the oil companies should have looked into their crystal ball and seen which way the wind was blowing and that it was all their fault that they were caught out, not the Government's.

The Minister's first proposition to the House was nearer the truth—that the possibility of the changes was kept from the industry to avoid its taking advantage of the information. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Either he kept it quiet, or the industry had a good idea what was going on. According to the article, the industry knew all about this, so it was the industry's own fault. What he still has not told us is what discussions he had with the Department of Trade and Industry over the past three and a half years. He himself has indicated that these changes were under discussion. I am sorry that the Minister for Energy has left the Chamber, as his body language, if not his verbal language, might have given a clue as to what discussions had taken place and what advice had been given to the industry. In any event, the Minister cannot claim that he acted out of ignorance, as he certainly had ample opportunity to get things right.

All else having failed, the Financial Secretary's fall-back position is that there may be up to 10,000 job losses but that such an estimate is based on a wildly improbable scenario. Well, it is the Treasury's own scenario—and the Treasury is not given to putting forward such scenarios. I accept that we must all be careful about crying wolf. We are indebted to Grampian regional council for commissioning a study by Professor Kemp of Aberdeen university petroleum and economics consultancy. I appreciate that both Ministers took time out of a busy day to meet a deputation from the north-east of Scotland, including the convenor of Grampian regional council Dr. Middleton, the Lord Provost of the city of

[Mr. Hughes]

Aberdeen James Wyness, the chairman of Aberdeen chamber of commerce Robin Pollock, and representatives of all political parties.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Including the Tories.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, the Conservatives were certainly there.

In this regard, there appears to be near-unanimity in the north-east of Scotland—a very rare occurrence. I understand that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) made a mysterious appearance at the meeting this morning. I do not know what he said, but perhaps at some stage he and the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) will tell us not just what they think about the situation but also what they intend to do about it. If last night's voting is anything to go by, they will back the Government all the way.

The Financial Secretary has seen a copy of the report to which I have referred and will know that Professor Kemp and his unit are very well respected in the oil industry. These are not people who have suddenly come out of the woodwork; they have studied the industry for years, and their conclusions must be taken very seriously. I do not have the time this evening to go into the detail or the methodology of the report. I shall say simply that it is well reasoned, well argued and well researched. It deals with the effects on each sector of the industry and does not concern itself simply with the downside. The two conclusions are very sober and are certainly not exaggerated.

It is conceded that some parts of the industry will do well. Those with fields in production will have an incentive to prolong the active life of their reserves. Professor Kemp's guestimate—he admits that that is what it is—is that, as a result of the changes, about 1,000 jobs may be retained or created. Others in the industry argue that the incentive to prolong the life of the fields is there anyway. There is great financial advantage to be obtained from keeping the fields going. Sooner or later, when production is exhausted, the rehabilitation costs of removing structures and restoring sub-sea conditions will be massive. In any event, extraction policy will not be abandoned for the sake of minor tax changes; the real incentive is avoidance or deferral of rehabilitation costs.

Everyone accepts that there is a downside. I refer to the prospects for the exploration and appraisal of new fields.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is it true that Professor Kemp's analysis considers only prospects involving quantities under 50 million barrels?

Mr. Hughes: I do not think that that is the case. Professors Kemp's report presents a study of fields of that size and smaller fields. This is precisely the area in which the major damage will be done. If there were a sudden huge oil discovery—twice or three times the size of the biggest field, larger than Forties or any other—the tax changes would have no effect in this regard except that, as we know perfectly well, such a find would result in changes in tax policy.

5.15 pm

I do not know whether it is fashionable or allowable to quote Aneurin Bevan. He said, "Why look in the crystal ball when you can read the book?" Anyone who reads the book can see quite clearly that there has already been a downturn in exploration. Professor Kemp argues that that trend will be accelerated. Using the very modest multiplier of 1·25, a reduction of 33 in the number of wells drilled would result in 8,500 job losses—7,500, allowing for the 1,000 which might be saved—and a reduction of 50 in the number off wells drilled would result in 12,250 job losses or 11,250 net. Studies carried out by Aberdeen university over many years have shown that a multiplier as high as 1·78 could be used quite safely, without risk of exaggeration. That would result in the loss of 10,780 jobs or 9,780 net—or 17,020—16,020 net. At a conservative estimate, Grampian region would lose 4,000 to 6,000 jobs —a very serious situation on the basis of either forecast, and one that ought not to be discounted.

The message is quite clear: if the Government are not willing to change, we must at the very least have transitional relief, with capping, so that the smaller companies derive the greatest benefit and thus avoid the prospect mentioned by, among others, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith)—that there will be some sort of distortion of activity. The hon. Gentleman's approach to business is novel. The proposition that people go into the high-risk business of North Sea oil, which involves very large capital costs, on the basis that they will make money from tax relief is preposterous.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Gentleman has again mentioned the question of economic distortion. Did not Professor Kemp say that it is difficult to defend the fact that, under the present regime, post-tax returns exceed pre-tax returns? Did he not accept that the pre-Budget position was unsatisfactory and was in need of reform?

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman wishes me to go through every page of Professor Kemp's report and argue every detail, we shall be here until well after midnight. The hon. Gentleman is being very selective. I do not think that there is any difference between the parties in the Committee with regard to the fact that the Government faced a need to find money. That is the Government's basic objective—it has nothing to do with the unsatisfactory nature of the system. Having made their decision, the Government naturally looked around for suitable candidates for easy pickings. They took note of the oil industry's negative tax receipts, the pay-back, and ignored the fact that most of the costs that had to be paid back arose after the Piper Alpha incident. They did not work through the way in which smaller companies—the exploration companies in particular—would be hit.

It is not just Professor Kemp's report which presents these conclusions about the downside of the tax changes. The same message comes from many quarters, one of which is the Association of Service Sector Oil-Related Companies, which represents about 300 companies. Again, I could deal with that body's comments individually, but if I did so very few other hon. Members would be able to take part in the debate.

Wood Mackenzie—another company which has a great deal of experience in the industry and is very concerned about the changes—says in its report:

"If, as expected, the United Kingdom exploration and appraisal drilling levels fall sharply, the measures could be bad for the country in the long term, both in terms of balance of payments and the Government's revenue from the North sea."

That company has no political affiliation to the Labour party. I should not like to put a political label on Ian Wood.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Tory.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is entitled to his view. I do not want to put anyone off Ian Wood's sagacious comments by saying that he is a Tory. They are good comments. These are serious dangers.

Professor Kemp points out that many companies may find it difficult to finance and develop export markets. As the downturn in the oil industry comes about—it is bound to come sooner or later—we in the north-east of Scotland do not want to be left with a ghost town. Aberdeen has benefited much from the North sea and so has Grampian, but we have not done so well in terms of cash from the Government to pay for the infrastructure. We do not want to be left with nothing once the industry has gone. We must build up indigenous companies which not only supply the North sea but are involved in the export market.

Confidence in the North sea is important. My goodness, the Government should know about confidence—they are for ever telling us about confidence, how important it is and how vital it is for the future of Britain that everyone should have confidence in the Government. The Government seem to think that they can destroy the confidence of companies in the North sea and that, when it suits them in two or three years' time, when perhaps they will change the regime again for their own purposes, the companies will simply come back again. The fact is that companies will not come back again once they have gone. They can go elsewhere to a less hostile physical environment and a more stable, congenial or amenable tax regime—and if they go, they will not come back. The Government simply cannot play ducks and drakes with the economy of north-east Scotland or the country at large.

The Financial Secretary and the Minister for Energy seem to have disappeared. I do not know whether they have rushed out to read the reports again and to consider whether to change their minds. I do not know whether the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has had reports of this morning's meetings, at which all said that they had a good hearing from the Financial Secretary and the Minister for Energy. Perhaps the Chief Secretary is frightened that they listened too well and has sent them packing so that he can take over the debate. We shall have to wait and see.

I hope that the Government will seriously listen to the representations from all parties, from many sections of the industry and from the whole of commerce. The chamber of commerce is certain that unless the Government are prepared to relent, unless they are prepared to have proper transitional relief, unless they are prepared to stop thinking only of the short term, great damage will be done to the North sea oil industry, to the economy of Grampian and to the country at large.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I am not concerned about the overall direction of the changes. If I had such doubts, I assure my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that his excellent speech on Second Reading would have brought them to an end. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend's commitment to a low tax, low allowances regime, which is much simpler to administer and operate, is a perfectly worthy policy which I am happy to support. Nor, despite comments from the Opposition Benches a few moments ago, do I doubt the need to raise extra money from time to time, the need for fiscal prudence and—I hope that this will be the reality—an extra £700 million from the oil industry.

However, a considerable number of oil companies and—of equal importance, particularly in my constituency—a considerable number of the companies which provide the back-up to exploration, development and production, are concerned about the way in which the changes are likely to be introduced. The proposals represent one of the most fundamental changes to the North sea fiscal regime since the beginning of activity on the continental shelf and certainly the most significant shift in policy for the past decade.

Therefore, I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it is not unreasonable to provide some meaningful transitional arrangements, and that is the purpose of my few brief comments. Phasing in the changes would allow the United Kingdom supplies sector to adjust to the new circumstances and provide a more stable environment for the operating companies to fulfil the commitments made to the Government in good faith when licences were granted, particularly during the 11th and 12th rounds. I cannot believe that it is not possible to come up with a solution which provides a balanced phasing between the reduction in the rate of PRT and the removal of exploration and appraisal relief—this is the crux of the matter—on a fiscally neutral basis.

I was greatly reassured by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary on Second Reading. In summing up the debate he recognised the need to avoid unnecessary dislocation and assured the House that the Government would seek ways of doing just that. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it is crucial that the service sector in particular is given the chance to adapt. An abrupt removal of the ability of companies to offset the cost of exploration and appraisal against profits generated on PRT-paying fields could lead to a reduction in exploration activities.

Much has also been said in the past few weeks about inefficient exploration by oil companies. Some people seem to believe that their attitude to drilling wells is based on a wing and a prayer, to which is added a huge cushion from the taxpayer. I do not believe that that is so. It is difficult to reconcile that with the comment of my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy that 1992 had the highest success rate ever for exploration drilling in the North sea.

For those reasons, I urge my hon. Friend to consider seriously the representations that he has received to provide some transitional relief. The precedent is there and it can be done on a fiscally neutral basis. When the changes to the rules governing corporation tax were introduced in 1984, a major element of the Government's package was a progressive phasing out of the allowances over a period of four years. There are many parallels between those 1984 proposals and the current proposals, not least the wish to widen the tax base and reduce the level of allowances. The major difference is the lack of any meaningful transition.

I hope that proper consideration will be given to allowing companies such as those in my constituency to take their business forward in an orderly and efficient manner, and time for them to adjust is the key. I urge my hon. Friend to propose a solution which prevents the dislocation to which he referred on Second Reading. Failing that, I hope that my hon. Friend is aware of the

[Mr. Roger Knapman]

problems that I have sought to describe and that he will be able to address them at a later stage during the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: At the end of last year, as a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, I was heavily lobbied by oil and gas companies in the North sea who were concerned that drastic changes might be introduced to the contracts for providing gas for electricity generation. Within the Committee, I successfully resisted the idea that we should break up those contracts and so cause damage and loss of confidence within the industry.

At that time, interestingly enough, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) launched a high-profile campaign on the need to do that. Then, suddenly, the Budget introduced a potentially much more damaging measure, without any warning, consultation or opportunity for the industry to express a view.

During the past few weeks, the industry has been in a state of confusion and disarray as it has tried to analyse who will be the winners and the losers and the implications. It is the job of the House and the Committee to look not just at the industry but also at the national interest over time. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) referred to transitional arrangements for previous changes in the oil tax regime and to the reason why those arrangements were introduced.

5.30 pm

In 1986, when we suffered the effects of a sharp price downturn in the North sea, I was very active in trying to persuade the Government to introduce tax changes. It is worth reminding the Committee and the Chief Secretary, who showed no interest or attention at the time because it was not an area with which he had previously had contact, that the purpose of the changes was to try to ensure that there was a built-in incentive for companies to invest and to reinvest in the North sea so that there would be a kick-start to activity and to confidence. Those changes were successful. Activity has recovered, and there have been successes over the past couple of years in exploration activity.

Unfortunately, the Minister for Energy is not here; he has put in only a brief appearance. It is worth reminding the House what he said in the Brown Book this year:

"Activity offshore continued apace. Drilling activity fell slightly during 1992 but the success rate reached a new high with another 20 discoveries of oil and gas. For the 12th year running, the increase in known reserves has exceeded production. Not only has 1992 seen a further increase in the number of fields, but production too has been above 1991 levels. There has been a record level of investment."

How is that likely to continue given the proposed changes?

Exploration activity is at a level that is near the level reached before the downturn of 1986. Following the introduction of the tax measures in 1986, there was a peak of 152 exploration wells drilled in 1990. The figure dropped to 72 wells in 1992. In 1992, there were 41 appraisal wells compared with a low in 1986 of only 40. Development drilling was the one area in which activity was high; the figure was 140 compared with 85.

The implication of the figures is that the Government are running a real risk of introducing a depression in exploration and appraisal activity when the activity is already in a downturn. The consequences are not hard to see. I urge the Financial Secretary to take on board the point that no hon. Member—not even the Minister for Energy—disputes the one fundamental fact that the changes, if implemented, will lead to an immediate sharp downturn in the drilling industry and to a consequential loss of jobs. That is not a matter for debate; hon. Members on both sides accept that point. The Government must address the issue.

I have been interested by the contrasting speeches from Back-Bench Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said that he believed in tax-cutting measures, and that was why he welcomed the changes. The hon. Member for Stroud told us that he favoured the changes because they would raise revenue. The proposals cannot do both. Over the past few weeks, there has been confusion about whether the changes will yield a net increase in revenue.

As I said in an intervention in the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), the Government have done themselves considerable damage in terms of the stability and predictability of the regime operating in the North sea. The Liberal Democrats have never argued against a continual adaptation of the tax regime to meet needs, but we believe that there should be fine tuning, that the regime should be predictable and that it should be introduced by consultation and negotiation. We believe that the implications of changes should be fully understood.

The Government have proudly boasted in past years that they have created just such a regime, but they have now torn up their credit without any real consideration of the long-term implications. That is why there is a definite case for transitional arrangements, and that is why I shall support amendment No. 21.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has tabled a constructive amendment, No. 40, to which I have put my name. It allows some flexibility in the application of the transitional arrangements, which seems to make sense. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) will be a member of the Standing Committee on the Bill, and he will table amendments on our behalf. I hope that the Government will recognise that they are constructive and workable. They should be considered as a way in which to ensure that changes are introduced without a sudden and sharp downturn in activity.

According to the report produced by Professor Alex Kemp, there is likely to be a net loss of jobs of between 7,500 and 11,250. That is a relatively cautious estimate, which accords with the Treasury's estimates. In the north-east of Scotland, the estimate is for a loss of jobs of 4,000 to 6,000, which in a relatively small economy represents a significant downturn which will have consequences on the local economy.

I lived through the downturn of 1986, so I know that it was an experience that no one in the north-east wishes to repeat. Processions of people came to my constituency surgery who had not only lost their jobs but found that, because of the downturn in activity, the fall in price of their houses had dropped them into sharp negative equity. New houses were being sold by builders at a price lower than that for similar houses and lower than people's mortgages.

Some of those people are still having to pay off debts that they incurred then. Interestingly, no measures of

assistance were forthcoming from the Government, and nothing was done to try to alleviate the hardship. We do not want to experience that again.

When I tried to enlist the then Prime Minister's support, her argument was that the North sea accounted for only 6 per cent. of gross national product and for only 0·5 per cent. of employment. That showed a cavalier and dismissive attitude. The Government's attitude towards the North sea has been that it is more a source of revenue than an industry that needs to be given stability and momentum.

The effects of uncertainty are far-reaching. I know of one company involved in the drilling supply sector in my constituency which was sufficiently concerned for no fewer than 350 of the employees to send a letter to me immediately after the Budget expressing their concern about the future of their jobs. Many other constituents have written to me expressing concern about the future.

The fabrication yards in the highlands are extremely short of orders. Highland Fabricators and McDermott's have also said that they find the uncertainty extremely worrying. The Government make great play of confidence. The sudden change in direction has damaged confidence in the industry when confidence has been somewhat fragile in recent months.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Has the hon. Gentleman received any letters from the several thousand employees of BP whose jobs, according to BP, have been made more secure by the petroleum revenue tax reforms?

Mr. Bruce: That is not necessarily true. The hon. Gentleman may know that BP has made many people redundant in the past year and has very much damaged its own internal relations by the way in which it has handled the redundancies. BP is the largest employer in my constituency, so I am very mindful of what BP has said. However, I have also gone on the record as saying that BP's financial difficulties are well known. It is not surprising, therefore, that BP is likely to welcome a windfall which will help its short-term return to profitability. The balance between the long term and the short term is part of the fundamental debate, as is the balance between individual companies and the national interest.

The regime will hit one sector very hard. It is extremely unfortunate because, in recent years, we have begun to build a British indigenous drilling and drilling supply industry. It will be seriously damaged, without justification and without warning. The Government should take that factor on board; I urge them to recognise that that is the strongest case for a transitional arrangement which will allow the industry to adjust.

The second point that must be taken on board concerns the success rate of exploration—precisely the matter to which the Minister for Energy referred. The danger now is that the Government are encouraging people to invest in the existing infrastructure at the expense of seeking new fields and new developments for the future. Exploration is, by definition, an uncertain business, and incentive to explore has been extremely productive in the national interest. There has been plenty of evidence of that, not least in either the fourth or fifth round in which blocks were auctioned, when Shell and Esso paid £21 million for the so-called golden block, on which they proceeded to drill three dry holes. The major discovery associated with that round was the Brent field, which is on one of the blocks that Shell and Esso were forced to take in association with the one that they wished to buy. Oil does not always come out of the ground exactly where one expects it to and exploration is a risky business.

I urge the Government to consider the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central—that the Government are giving companies a return on their profits that they have no obligation whatever to reinvest in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield said that he hoped and believed that companies would reinvest. But the existing regime ensures that they do—not by direction or force but by making it so financially attractive that, by definition, they will orient their future activity back to the United Kingdom.

There are many bids in other parts of the world to attract activity away. There is much talk about the opportunities in places such as Kazakhstan and Vietnam. We need to ensure that we have a regime that encourages continuing investment here and takes into account the national interest, which requires us to maintain continuity of employment and expertise as well as the ability of British-based companies to develop and enhance that expertise. We need a regime that is designed to ensure that we maximise exploration and the discovery of new reserves and that the industry has a long-term stable future.

I am not persuaded that the changes were introduced for the good of the industry. I think that they were introduced because the Government believed that they needed money and needed it fast. In introducing them, the Government have knocked the confidence of the industry. They have damaged the drilling industry and have threatened the livelihoods of thousands of people in the north-east of Scotland. I urge the Minister to take those points extremely seriously and to recognise that, at the very least, transitional arrangements should be introduced to minimise the impact of the changes.

I am not happy when Government Departments say that they have deliberately calculated that a tax regime will cost 10,000 jobs, and when they apparently regard that as acceptable. That is destructive, and unnecessarily so. It should be possible to devise a regime that will secure the industry, the jobs and the future. The proposals as they stand do not do that, and I urge the Government to make sure that, when they have finished with them, they do.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): I do not intend to detain the Committee unduly but I feel that there are some points that need to be made.

Let me start by addressing the imbalanced view that the Committee must have of Professor Kemp's recent report. Professor Kemp has been widely but selectively quoted by Opposition Members, and it is only right that the Committee should see the other side of what Professor Kemp had to say. Given what has been said, the Committee will be surprised to learn that Professor Kemp actually accepts that the pre-Budget position was unsatisfactory and was in need of reform. He is quite clear about that. He also said that the new arrangements will substantially improve the profit margins on the larger existing fields which have until now been very low. Anyone who knows anything about the North sea will know that that is to be welcomed.

Professor Kemp also acknowledges that the changes will considerably improve the net present value return

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

from incremental investment on mature fields. Given the circumstances pertaining in the North sea, that is vital. He further acknowledges that the changes will give significant cash flow benefits to larger new oil fields. As we have discovered in recent weeks and with recent announcements, the days of finding major strikes in the North sea are far from over.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) was quick to quote directly from Professor Kemp's report in what was probably one of the classic selective quotations of all time. What the hon. Gentleman did not do was to read out the next two sentences, which put a wholly different complexion on the matter. Let me read out the whole paragraph, which the hon. Gentleman refused to do. Professor Kemp said:

"The presence of only one simple fiscal instrument applied to new petroleum exploitation activities in the form of a corporate income tax at 33 per cent. is quite unique among major petroleum producing provinces. It must constitute a significant attraction."

That last was the sentence that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central refused to quote. Professor Kemp continued:

"The level of take is certainly low by international standards."

5.45 pm

I concede that Professor Kemp had some criticisms to make of the Government's arrangements but they must be seen in their proper context and must not be taken in isolation—which Opposition Members were keen to do. Professor Kemp is critical in his assessment of the impact on exploration but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said, Professor Kemp's assessment only considers prospects up to 50 million barrels in size, in respect of which petroleum revenue tax is not paid anyway. He leaves out completely the benefit of the abolition of PRT for larger discoveries. That is a significant omission on his part.

The Opposition have been quick to go to all sorts of independent analysts to find quotations to back up their case. I, too, can do that. Norman Smith of Smith Rea Energy Associates has gone on record as saying:

"The Chancellor has provided the majors with more of the funds that they need to tackle the frontiers, while at the same time making re-investment in production in the United Kingdom more attractive relative to foreign areas."

It is no use bandying quotations about: we can each find one to prove whatever we want to prove.

Mr. Darling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No. I listened to the hon. Gentleman without interrupting; perhaps he will do me the same courtesy.

The changes should be supported. The increased cash flow that will come from them will assist funding of significant——

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West) On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Is it in order for an hon. Member to refer to and specifically quote another hon. Member and not give way when that second hon. Member seeks to intervene?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): That is entirely a matter of judgment for the hon. Member in question.

Mr. Robertson: The changes should be supported because the increased cash flow that will come from them will assist funding of significant additional North sea activity, and that cannot be denied. The life of the existing fields will also be extended. More oil and gas will be recovered than would have been the case; that also cannot be denied. The changes will allow for new fields and discoveries to be developed far earlier and far more quickly than would previously have been possible. The industry has up to 80 fields waiting to be developed. When jobs are being considered, the jobs that will be created from the development of those fields must be taken into consideration as well.

It has been said that exploration will be affected. It will be affected but it will not be as adversely affected as claimed. The Budget changes leave untouched a signficant amount of exploration activity. Moreover, there is still relief for exploration wells drilled within 5 km of an existing PRT paying field, giving added incentive and added encouragement for greater exploitation of resources which we know are already there.

The proposals——

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman be quite specific and answer yes or no: is he saying that he believes that no change whatever is required in the Chancellor's changes and that he will support them irrespective of the job losses in his own constituency?

Mr. Robertson: As I have tried to point out, I think that the proposals are in the best long-term interests of the North sea. If the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) can wait until the end of my remarks, he will discover how I intend to vote this evening.

The proposals have had a bad press; there is no doubt about that. Despite what has been said here and elsewhere, I believe that they have stood up quite well to the intense scrutiny to which they have been subjected. Just as I could not support moves at the beginning of the year to encourage the Government to dig for uneconomic coal, I cannot now encourage them to help companies to drill for uneconomic oil. There is no sense in subsidising oil companies to drill merely for the sake of their own tax bill. With companies representing two thirds—66 per cent.—of past and future capital expenditure in the North sea firmly behind them, the proposals are obviously in the long-term interests of the North sea oil and gas industry. The changes move us from a low-risk, low-reward North sea to a high-risk, high-reward North sea and, in reply to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North, I have no hesitation whatever in recommending them to the House.

Mr. Hoon: Clause 183 would reduce petroleum revenue tax on the operation of existing oilfields and abolish it on new fields. Therefore, it would abolish the tax relief that was available for the cost of exploration and appraisal on those new fields with effect from 16 March 1993. What is the Government's intention? Clearly, they want to raise revenue to fill the gap in public sector finances. Sadly, that seems to be the only consideration that they have taken into account. Unfortunately, they seem to have ignored the wider effects of their decision. It is necessary to ask whether it makes sense to abandon what all hon. Members agree is a stable tax position—which was successful in attracting investment into the North sea in the late 1980s—at a time when the country's energy policy, so soon after the closure of so many collieries, is beset by uncertainty

and instability. It is extremely difficult to see any signs of a longer-term energy strategy in the Government's proposal.

If it is necessary to spell out the importance of the North sea to Britain's economy for the benefit of Conservative Members, it might be worth mentioning a number of statistics. The North sea has contributed more than £115 billion in tax revenue. We have had about 11 billion barrels of oil, and a further 7 billion barrels of oil are available. It is not surprising that estimates as to how much is still to be discovered vary, but they range from 4 billion barrels to as much as 25 billion barrels. That is a significant amount of oil, the recovery of which will help to boost the country's economy. Instead of importing oil, Britain could expect to remain self-sufficient in oil well into the next century. Those discoveries have made, and should continue to make, a crucial contribution to our balance of payments, provided the Government remain prepared to leave in place the existing tax arrangements. Will the Government put at risk that benefit to the country's economy for the sake of a short-term addition to their shaky finances?

Comments have been made about the likely reaction of oil companies to the change in the tax position proposed by the Government. On any view, it will make oil companies reluctant to invest the substantial sums of money that are required to explore and develop new oilfields. That must be the case especially in the North sea. Reference has been made to the maturity of the North sea field. That means almost inevitably that new exploration is likely to be in the more difficult and marginal areas. Given a choice between investment decisions in more marginal North sea oilfields and investment in other parts of the world where other incentives may be available to companies, multinational oil companies, which have no loyalty to the United Kingdom, will be tempted to go elsewhere.

Reliable estimates suggest that exploration activity might be cut by as much as a half. After all, many areas of the world—a number have already been mentioned—are competing for new oil development. Obviously, those areas will benefit from the employment implications of the changes that the Government have apparently all too readily conceded will be the result of their proposals.

The Treasury has accepted that as many as 10,000 jobs may be lost. Perhaps not surprisingly, others have suggested that the number of job losses may be greater than 10,000. The majority of those jobs will be lost in Scotland, but many people who are employed directly and indirectly in the oil industry throughout the United Kingdom will be adversely affected. That is hardly sensible at a time when the country is suffering from the effects of high unemployment.

I shall quote from a document that I received this morning from the Association of Service Sector Oil-Related Companies, which puts the case graphically: "the existing proposals"—

in the Budget—

"will act as a disincentive to continued North sea exploration and result in substantial job losses across the sector, weaken their ability to expand and grow into international markets, drain technological innovation from the United Kingdom, and increase smaller companies' vulnerability to hostile takeover bids. As a consequence"—

this is the conclusion—

"the United Kingdom economy as a whole will suffer."

That means that whatever oil is waiting to be discovered in the North sea will probably continue to wait until the opportunity is taken to develop new fields for the benefit of British consumers and, ultimately—this has been justified in terms of revenue raising—for the benefit of the British taxpayer.

The Chancellor and, indeed, the Financial Secretary have made much of justifying the change in the sense that the existing petroleum revenue tax system is costing the country money and subsidising exploration by oil companies. In one sense, that is true. We cannot argue against the figures that have been made available. However, the Chancellor and the Financial Secretary overlooked the fact that, in 1984-85, the United Kingdom raised about £12 billion in tax receipts from North sea oil. Tax receipts have obviously fallen because of lower levels of production as part of the recession and the fall in world oil prices.

By abandoning the present tax arrangements unilaterally in the way that the Government propose, they are abandoning the prospect of substantial tax relief in the future. They are effectively abandoning investment in the North sea in terms of gaining benefits today in extra tax revenue and forgoing the prospect of higher revenue later. By discouraging new investment, we will be dependent on the reduced levels of revenue that flow from fields already under development. We will be giving up for all time the revenue from new finds, which will not take place as a result of this change.

The Labour party believes that it is necessary to continue to support investment in the North sea and encourage exploration and development of new fields. In such circumstances, it cannot make sense to make a sudden arbitrary and short-term tax change. Even if the Government are determined to go ahead with the change in principle, surely it makes sense to consider our amendments which will allow transitional relief and the phasing-in of the proposals, otherwise we risk jeopardising Britain's employment prospects and the prospect of new exploration and development. As a result, we risk severely damaging our balance of payments position for the sake of a short-term contribution to the Government's finances. This is a panic measure introduced by a panic-stricken Government.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I shall not detain the Committee for long. There has been general concern about the change announced in the Budget and the Committee should discuss it in the serious way that it is and in a fairly objective way. Like some of my colleagues, I want some reassurances from my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary during the debate.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) understated the case in some respects. Perhaps it is the modern Labour way—having indulged in wild excess for many years, ultra-moderation is the way to get the message across. I welcome that as a general political principle, but on this occasion the hon. Gentleman underplayed his case. The fact is that Britain is a world leader in oil and gas exploration technology. The hon. Gentleman did not make much of that point. The United States and Britain are the two world leaders in oil and gas exploration technology.

There are few areas of British industry in which we have the depth and extensiveness of knowledge and experience that we have in the oil industry. When we look at our

[Mr. John Horam]

national advantages and our natural areas of competitiveness, we are spread rather thin—we are involved in many areas but not doing especially well in them. In the oil industry, we have an enormous depth of expertise and knowledge. We are using that expertise and knowledge not only to explore the North field but in other parts of the world—that point has already been made.

If we change the financial basis of our technological advantage, we must think carefully. It is a mistake to make dramatic changes of this sort. It is a mistake in principle to make dramatic taxation changes; I favour gradual changes in taxation in so far as they affect our industrial competitiveness. There is no doubt that the exploration effort in the North sea and elsewhere may well be affected by these changes, to Britain's disadvantage. There has been some dispute about that. Various figures have been bandied about the Chamber. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) and other hon. Members mentioned a figure of 50 per cent.—my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) disputed that.

What is my hon. Friend the Minister's estimate of the likely effects of the change in taxation? He may say that he cannot make a sensible estimate because he does not know exactly what the regime will be. However, I presume that the Treasury made an analysis before announcing the change. It must have made some assumptions about the likely effect on the industry of such a change, even before it had a chance to announce the change. What is my hon. Friend's feeling now about the likely effect on the exploration activity in the North sea as a result of the tax changes?

6 pm

As others have said, the reason for the tax changes is that we must have general regard to the level of public expenditure and our problems with the deficit. We must consider increasing revenue. In the case of the oil industry, in the current financial year we shall make a gift to the industry of about £200 million, having taken a large amount over the years. As one of my hon. Friends said, the current position should not last long. None the less, we should not give a seismic shock to the industry to deal with a tax handback to one industry which may not be typical of what will happen every year. Is this an extraordinary year? Are the current circumstances unique? Will the £200 million handback increase every year or does it reflect the circumstances of the moment?

I am not sure that it is sensible to deal with what may be a relatively short-term position in the way that the Government propose. I am aware that discussions are taking place between the industry and the Treasury. I welcome those discussions. It is a pity that they have had to take place post-Budget. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said that he accepted that Budget purdah had to operate and that it was inevitable that such measures were not properly discussed with the energy department of the Department of Trade and Industry before they were announced.

I would be rather more radical than the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. It is proper in any sensible Government that there should be discussion with the relevant Department and especially the DTI about such changes in taxation. One of the faults of our Government has been that, as a result of the nature of government, they have not been able to arrange sensible, discrete discussions with the sponsoring Department before Budget changes of this character are made. That is a pity. I should like to see some changes made in that direction in future.

I do not go along with the argument that we should make such a change for short-term, tax-raising reasons. The oil industry is too important to subject it to such considerations. I want to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister that he has considered the position seriously, seen that there is a problem in the shape of the tax take from the industry, which has now become a tax give, and that he is prepared to re-examine the position. I want to hear that he has some objective and clear-cut ideas about the nature of the tax regime that he seeks to impose and that the change has been made, despite appearances to the contrary, for serious and objective reasons.

I want to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister that we can put in place a regime, the general character of which will last as long as the previous regime lasted. If we are dealing with a change that will help the industry and protect our acknowledged lead in the technology of oil and gas exploration, I shall support the Government because we shall be making the change for sensible tax-planning reasons. But I cannot support industrial competitiveness being damaged for short-term tax reasons.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Clause 183 abolishes petroleum revenue tax on oil and gas fields which are given development consent after 14 March this year. But it is just one element in a radically new tax regime for the North sea which has already been described by many experts and analysts as being designed mainly to put money into the coffers of the Treasury. At the same time, and as a direct result of the Government's short-term obsession with boosting the Treasury take, the new tax regime is likely to destroy future exploration programmes in the North sea.

The new tax regime will effectively shorten the economic life of the North sea. It will certainly cost thousands of exploration jobs in the North sea. It will seriously damage the oil service sector of the Scottish economy. In the long term, it is also likely to have serious implications for the new safety regime in the North sea which was introduced after the Piper Alpha tragedy some years ago.

Clause 183 is extremely important. The amendments which have been tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends are designed to put off the evil day when the new regime and the damaging consequences which will flow from it come to pass. The amendments will certainly be supported by Opposition Members, but they should also be supported by Conservative Members, in particular those who represent constituencies in Scotland, and especially the north-east of Scotland, as do the hon. Members for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) and for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

I am afraid that, tragically, we are likely to come up against the phenomenon that we witnessed last night in the debate on value added tax on domestic fuel and power. Conservative Members will be whipped through the Lobbies in support of proposals which are neither in their interests nor in the interests of their constituents. They will vote for the proposal to defend a discredited and bankrupt Government and, even more questionably, to defend their squalid little careers within that Government in the years ahead.

The Government will present what they are doing in a different light. They will package it in glowing phrases about sweeping away outdated, anachronistic and old-fashioned tax regimes which are no longer appropriate to the North sea. They will talk about introducing major reforms which will provide the industry with a stable framework for its future development. They will even trot out their supporters among the big oil companies to give some industry credibility to what they seek to do in the North sea. Such supporters include the chief executive of BP, Mr. David Simon, who has already welcomed the changes. He has forecast that investment in the North sea will be directly stimulated as a result of the changes; indeed, he has predicted even bigger profits for his company and other companies in the North sea.

I am sure that Mr. Simon is sincere in what he says about the changes. I can quote directly what he said in *The Press and Journal* immediately after the Budget proposals were announced. He said:

"I believe these reforms will encourage development of larger discoveries like west of Shetland, where a higher rate of return is needed to balance the increased risks and costs of operating in the more demanding deep-water environment."

That is all very fair, but Mr. Simon's company, BP, made the spectacular oil find in the west of Shetland last autumn and will develop that field. His company, BP, will pay the lower rate of petroleum revenue tax on oil produced from that field and, indeed, other fields. His company, BP, will now be able to make even greater profits than it has already made in the North sea this year.

I have here a quote from *The Press and Journal* of 7 May which announced a "BP profits gush". It said:

"BP stormed back into the black in the first quarter of the year . . . The oil giant saw net profits soar to £325 million compared with a loss in the corresponding period last year of £61 million."

So it is good times for BP and probably even better times ahead with the increased profits that it is likely to accrue from the changes in the North sea tax regime in relation to the discovery that it has made west of Shetland.

If the proposed new tax regime had been in place one or two years ago, before BP and Mr. Simon were given development consent west of Shetland, would they be so enthusiastic about it? If, before BP explored west of Shetland, it had faced the prospect of not being able to offset its exploration and appraisal costs against its existing liability for PRT, and seeing those costs quadruple at a stroke as a direct result, would it still have gone ahead with that exploration? I think that the answer is no. In fact, the full headline from *The Press and Journal* of 7 March reads:

"Cost cutting helps BP profits gush"

It is because of such cost cutting that BP has been able to get itself in the black. If it is faced with the prospect of exploration costs quadrupling overnight, the first thing it will cut will be exploration itself, because that prejudices its chances of making profits.

Under the new tax regime there will be winners and losers, but the Opposition fear that there will be far more losers than winners. Professor Alex Kemp of Aberdeen university, who has already been quoted several times today, says that he expects there to be a "host of losers" and "some winners"—he does not expect many. Those winners are likely to be the heavyweights, the major oil companies such as BP and Shell.

The losers will include the oil service companies, particularly those involved in drilling and exploration. They will include the smaller oil companies and the 14th oil and gas round that is about to be offered by the Department of Trade and Industry. They will include the thousands of workers who will lose their jobs and their families, who are dependent on their income. They will include the taxpayers, who will be expected to fork out up to £100 million in benefit to try to keep such workers out of proper employment. The losers will also include the Scottish-based service sector that supplies equipment for the North sea, such as mud pumps and drilling bits. Among those losers will be the many people who will remain working in the North sea for companies such as BP and other large companies.

It is important to remember how the new tax regime was established. The Chancellor was faced with a desperately bad public sector deficit and he cast about for the means either to cut Government expenditure or to boost Government revenue. At the same time, he also discovered that under the existing PRT regime, the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 was £200 million. The right hon. Gentleman was therefore determined to turn that situation around by scrapping all the allowances against PRT and thereby securing for the Exchequer, according to his estimation, £300 million in 1994-95 and £400 million in 1995-96. That turnaround is worth almost £1 billion. That is what the Chancellor expects to accrue from the changes. He tried to anticipate any backlash from the oil majors by buying them off with a reduction in their liabilities under PRT from 75 per cent. to 50 per cent. That must represent a saving of hundreds of millions of pounds for those companies.

In just two years, well in excess of £1 billion will be seized from the North sea oil economy by the Government and by the oil companies as a result of the PRT changes. That money must come from somewhere. It will be saved by companies undertaking less exploration and offering fewer jobs. Not only will that have damaging economic implications, but it will have serious implications for the North sea safety regime.

It is nearly five years since the Piper Alpha tragedy in the North sea in which 167 lives were lost. I have absolutely no doubt that the train of events that led directly to that tragedy began in 1986 with the then collapse in the oil price. That collapse cut the profits of oil companies and led directly to cuts in care and maintenance programmes and a decline in the priority that was accorded to safety. Here we are again, in 1993, discussing changes under which the Government and the big oil companies, working together, will take more than £1 billion out of the North sea economy. That may have serious, damaging implications for the current safety regime.

I know that the new safety case regime is in place following the Cullen inquiry. Reports and legislation are never sufficient to guarantee the highest safety standards in the North sea. To guarantee those standards, we must create the financial regime that is conducive to such standards. Because of the changes to PRT, however, profits will be squeezed because exploration costs will begin to rise. The contracts for drilling will become even more fiercely competitive than they are now and the temptation will inevitably be to make savings from wherever that is possible. I suspect that some companies will now try to get away with making savings on safety.

Blowout is the newspaper for offshore workers and the offshore industry liaison committee, the OILC. The June

[Mr. John McAllion]

1992 edition was published a month after the new safety regime was introduced and it provided information about one of the more recent tragedies in the North sea, the Cormorant Alpha helicopter tragedy, in which 11 men lost their lives. It provided proof that one of the victims had previously been disciplined

"for refusing to board a helicopter in circumstances similar to those on the night of March 14 when 11 men died."

It also noted:

"The pilot of the ill-fated Super Puma was not told of a serious weather hazard in the area."

6.15 pm

When Select Committees and inquiries, such as that headed by Cullen, take evidence on safety, the oil companies and their contractors never admit that that type of thing goes on. Similarly, they never admit that men who complain about lapses in the safety regime are victimised and blacklisted. That practice goes on to this very day in the North sea oil industry and hon. Members had better believe that. It goes on because of financial pressures, because companies are forced to cut costs again and again. The new tax regime is trying to make the same thing happen.

Someone must pay the price for all the money that will be taken from the North sea oil economy, and I suspect that it will be the workers, who will have to work in even worse, less safe conditions. That is the bottom line that we must take on board when we vote. That is why those Conservative Members who represent workers in the North sea must consider the safety of their constituents before they vote for a tax regime that will put those people's safety at even more risk in the years ahead.

I shall certainly check the voting list in *Hansard* tomorrow to see whether the hon. Members for Aberdeen, South and for Kincardine and Deeside and the other Scottish Tories voted for their constituents. They let the Scottish people down last night on VAT and they had better not let down the oil workers tonight.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): As has already been said, I represent the employees and staff of many of the oil companies, be they large, medium-sized or small. I also represent those who work for indigenous industries that have, over the years, become oil-related service companies and those who work for drilling and supply companies.

After the Budget on 16 March, I obviously received many letters on the subject of the proposed changes to the PRT. The response was mixed. I spent the day after the Budget talking to representatives of a medium-sized oil company and debating with them why a move to a low-tax, low-allowance regime was infinitely superior to a high-tax, high-allowance regime. I suggested that those changes would bring those companies into line with the rest of British industry, because, by allowing them to keep more of the profits that they make from their production or finds, they can reinvest in their companies to produce further profit in the future.

After a period of deep reflection, many of the oil companies that had expressed initial concerns about the tax change, perhaps having latched on to the allowance side, then completed their highly complex calculations—whatever any hon. Member may say, the PRT is a highly complex tax—and revised their opinion. They accepted that, in the medium to long term, the tax changes were significantly beneficial to them, their employees, the United Kingdom and the North sea oil industry.

It is important to stress that those benefits will be apparent in the medium and long term, however, because my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is aware of my deep concern about the transition period. As the arrangements stand, many of the incentives that the tax changes offer, will not come through for 18 months or two years at the earliest. I quote from this morning's Aberdeen *Press and Journal*:

"BP £2 million booster is oil jobs bonanza."

It may well be as a result of these tax changes that that has been brought forward. It probably is. But I must emphasise that the work will not begin until early in 1995 and we are now in 1993. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has already said, on Second Reading, that he wishes to minimise any dislocation in the industry, and I know that he recognises that there may be dislocation. I know that the oil companies share his wish to see a fiscal situation that satisfies the Treasury and becomes tax raising rather than a tax cash curb. I am, therefore, exceedingly grateful to my hon. Friend for receiving the deputations that I have taken to him from the north-east of Scotland, representing more than 60,000 employees in the North sea, who accept the medium to long-term benefit of the change, but who see that there will be a significant dislocation to the industry in the immediate future.

I am equally well aware of the Financial Secretary's concern that by building a transition period without controls one runs the risk of overheating the drilling and exploration side and putting up drilling costs. It is a concern shared by the industry: it is in no one's interest for that to happen So I know that the industry is very keen to assist my hon. Friend's officials to work out a satisfactory capping proposal that will be fair to the Treasury, fair to industry and fair to the future of the North sea.

I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) that the Treasury should seriously consider this problem, but I must quote—again, I am afraid, selectively—from Professor Kemp. I will not go into the details of his acceptance of the inevitability of the tax changes and whether they affect small companies or large, but the one point that he clearly makes in his summary is this:

"The abruptness of the implementation of the budget proposals will create disruption in the exploration sector of the industry. It will also have an adverse effect on investor confidence in this sector. Exploration companies, particularly the small ones"—

many of those are represented in my constituency—

"have based their E and A programmes on the basis of receiving full PRT relief for the expenditures. They can react in the short term only by sharply cutting their E and A activities. The result will be highly disruptive for the drilling contracting and supplies industry which are already suffering from trading difficulties. The medium term exploration effort of the smaller companies in the United Kingdom CS could also be put in jeopardy."

I know that that is only one opinion, and I know that British Petroleum and Shell have put an opposite opinion—they believe that there will be minimal dislocation and that the proposals should remain intact. Bearing in mind that I have in my constituency employees represented by BP and Shell, that puts me in a rather difficult position because they take the view that, in the short term as well as in the long, there will be no dislocation, but I believe that there will be a dislocation and that if my hon. Friend

the Financial Secretary looks seriously at a fiscally neutral adjustment to the transitional arrangements, it may well smooth the transition to what I believe will, in the medium to long term, be a better tax regime for all concerned.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Gentleman has quoted, and indicated from his own discussions with the oil companies, various views. Is he in a position to inform the House what has happened since the Budget and what companies have done with regard to plans that they may already have had for exploration and appraisal?

Mr. Kynoch: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, what has happened depends on which company one looks at. There has been a fairly mixed response. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and I attended a conference of oil companies at the weekend where we heard a very mixed response. Some contracts have been postponed, but other projects have been brought forward. The situation is not cut and dried. I believe, however, that many of the projects that have been conveniently announced at this time as being brought forward will not have their full effect on employment until 1995. There are small to medium-sized service companies in my constituency that will be put in jeopardy by the delay in the making of decisions and in the awarding of contracts. It gives me great concern.

However, the clause that we are discussing is not the one on which I have had representations for change. The Financial Secretary was good enough to hear the representations from my many constituents and has been good enough to allow his officials to continue discussions with representatives of the industry to try to determine whether the dislocation can be further minimised. I am sure that he knows that the appropriate clause—either clause 184 or clause 186—is most likely to be discussed in Committee upstairs.

I therefore conclude by urging my hon. Friend, while thanking him for having seen and considered these representations, to make sure that he understands the implications for my constituency, for the north-east of Scotland and for the United Kingdom Exchequer in the medium term.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Kynoch: I hope very much that by the time the Bill is considered in Committee upstairs the negotiations and discussions that which have gone on——

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Kynoch: ——will have brought to fruition a satisfactory result for the north-east of Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: I could have told the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) would not give way because it might have punctured the alibi that he constructed for the latter part of his speech.

I would say to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside that we are discussing the principle in clause 183. If the hon. Member really wants to see transitional relief, he need not go on pleading with his hon. Friend on the Front Bench; he just needs to join us in the Lobby to secure it.

There was an interesting contrast between the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside and his hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). It is some sort of double act that we are seeing here, the nice copper and the nasty one. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South works them up and then the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside is meant to soothe them down. However, with their voting behaviour in the space of 24 hours, they are running a severe risk. Yesterday, they voted to put value added tax on fuel, voting against the wishes of about 99 per cent. of their constituents; tonight, it seems, they will vote to put thousands of their constituents out of work and, later this evening, if I read the signs aright, they will vote to decimate our fishing industry. That is a triple whammie delivered by these two hon. Gentlemen which people in the north-east of Scotland will find very hard to understand and will take a long time to forget.

We are debating clause 183 but also the principle of the tax shift, and I want to speak, in particular, about amendment No. 40 in the names of my hon. Friends and myself and supported by Liberal Democrat Members in which we are trying to make some positive suggestions as to how transitional relief may be effected. We do not want to do it by means of the fiscally neutral position that the Treasury has sought—that if one gives with one hand and takes away with the other, it will be satisfactory for the Treasury. One will never reach a consensus in the industry by selling some companies that they will lose prospective revenue in order to benefit others. That is not possible. In amendment No. 40 we propose that for a period a company should continue to be able to opt to receive exploration and appraisal relief, at a certain percentage and subject to a ceiling in the case of each individual company, to remove any possibility of an excess in the claim of any one company. I was pleased that we received from the Leader of the House last Thursday an undertaking that if any of this evening's amendments were carried he would see that the consequential amendments which might be necessary were brought forward in Committee upstairs. The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside need have no fear about waiting for the Committee. All that he has to do is join us in the Division Lobby tonight.

There is a case for changing the tax regime in any oil province. The usual time to do it is when oil prices are riding high, and the industry is subject to overheating. Then, there can be a logical case for cooling down activity in the industry and at the same time getting more revenue for the Government. It is more questionable to do it when the industry, as at present, is already in a state of substantial over-capacity.

6.30 pm

There is a case for a low-taxation regime in the North sea. It is obvious that companies would like a reduction in their marginal rate of taxation. However, it is disingenuous for Ministers to quote major companies in the oil industry—Shell, BP and Mobil—all of which will benefit to the tune of many millions, perhaps even hundreds of millions, of pounds from the tax changes, as if that were some sort of independent assessment of the overall impact of the tax changes.

The story in the north-east of Scotland is that John Morgan of BP receives £10 million for every press conference that he gives. It is a sort of payment by results scheme. The more that BP praises the Government's taxation changes, the more that it realises how much it will

benefit from them. I am not attacking senior executives in BP who say what a good thing it is that the tax change will bring the company lots of money. That is an understandable position for any company facing such a tax change. However, the Government have to understand that what is good for BP is not necessarily good for the whole of the oil industry. It is the Government's duty, sadly neglected, to take an overall view and see what overall balance of effects will result from their taxation changes.

If drilling costs in the North sea are quadrupled—that will be the effect of the tax changes—that will have a substantial impact on the drilling sector and will cost a substantial number of jobs. Furthermore, because of the suddenness of the change, it will cause substantial dislocation, because many companies will face sudden cancellations of contracts.

We have been talking in general terms and about big companies. I want to read briefly to the Committee a letter that I received from Steve Lee, the manager of the advanced technology centre of Core Laboratories in Aberdeen. It is a subsidiary of a major company, and it employs 100 people in Aberdeen. Mr. Lee wrote to me on 30 April saying:

"Since I last wrote, the confidence of the oil industry has continued to decrease, which has resulted in exploration/appraisal wells being deferred. The consequence of this to my company has been a substantial decrease/loss of orders. This in turn led to 16 members of Core Laboratories staff being made redundant on April 27th, 1993.

A reduction of 16 per cent. of the workforce is considerable. Unless and until there is a rethink on PRT there is every likelihood of further layoffs in the coming months. I suggest consultation with the WHOLE of the oil industry would be beneficial to both the Treasury and the oil operators."

Those are the effects on real companies and people in the north-east of Scotland.

We are debating the overall effect, the net effect, of the changes. Clearly, some companies will benefit and some will lose. However, as has been pointed in some of the correspondence in the newspapers, it is a fairly simple matter for an oil company to adjust its activities so as to become a major gainer from the tax changes. If one wants to be a winner, all that one has to do is up sticks and start exploring in other oil provinces elsewhere. Those who do not explore in the North sea will not be subject to the quadrupling of the price of exploration and appraisal.

We have heard from certain organisations, including Grampian region, the chamber of commerce and the offshore industry liaison committee. They represent local authorities, many of the employers in the region and many of the workers in the industry. None of the organisations has an axe to grind. All of them have workers working for winners and those working for losers. All of them have taken an overall view of what the net effect of the tax changes will be in their area and in the oil industry as a whole. All of them have come to the conclusion that the overall effect will be strongly negative and that thousands of jobs are at stake because of the tax changes that the Government are proposing.

As has been said a number of times, we are grateful for the fact that Grampian region commissioned a report from AUDEC Consultants and Professor Kemp's team at Aberdeen university. Conservative Members have claimed that Professor Kemp has been quoted selectively. They have said that Opposition Members are only quoting the adverse remarks in the report and forgetting to mention the positive things that Professor Kemp had to say about the oil tax changes.

It is obvious that an academic, and in particular an informed academic like Professor Kemp, when he is looking at an overall tax change that involves reductions in taxation in certain sectors in certain areas, will say positive things about the effect of the reductions. However, it is also true that the basis of the report was the desire to come to a conclusion about what the overall effect would be on jobs in the oil industry. There is no doubt about that. The report summary says:

"The Scottish level employment fall forecast ranges between 7,500 to 11,250. It should be appreciated that this does allow for the retention of some jobs as a result of incremental investment.

At Grampian Regional level, the jobs lost could be 4,000 to 6,000. Greater jobs losses are quite possible."

Throughout the report, Professor Kemp erred on the side of caution in every estimate. For example, those of us who have been involved in oil economics know that, for the oil industry, it is usual to use a high multiplier effect in estimating the overall consequences of job reductions. In the oil industry one usually takes a multiplier of 1·78. So as not to exaggerate the consequences of the tax changes, Professor Kemp chose the more conventional multiplier used for the rest of the industry, that of 1·25. If he and his team had wanted to exaggerate the effect of the tax changes, they could, quite defensibly, have increased the figures substantially. Wherever they had to make a choice, they erred on the side of caution.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House should accept that we are looking at a potential impact of around 10,000 job losses if the tax changes go through unaltered. I believe—I think that many hon. Members will also believe—that 10,000 jobs is too great a number to be so casually disregarded by the Government.

Did the Government know that that would be the impact before they made the proposal? We have to look at the now renowned quotation in *The Press and Journal*, appropriately enough from an article that appeared on April fool's day, immediately after the Budget, which used a briefing that was attributed to a Treasury official. The famous quotation "from a senior advisor" was:

"For 10,000 (job losses) we are securing £400-£500 million a year in taxation."

It seems that the Government and the Treasury engaged in a calculation and thought that they could secure hundreds and millions of pounds' worth of additional taxation and, if there was a cost of 10,000 jobs, primarily in the north-east of Scotland, that was just too bad and it was a "price well worth paying".

I see a puzzled look on the face of the Minister for Energy. That is not unknown. Over recent weeks he has often looked puzzled and confused. As he is here and giving us the benefit of his facial expressions, even if he is not giving us the benefit of a contribution to the debate, could he answer one of the questions of the debate? Were he and his Department consulted before the Treasury put forward the taxation changes? Did he give advice that was disregarded or was he disregarded in that his advice was not even asked for?

I am happy to allow the Minister to intervene to answer, as the oil industry would like to have that question answered. I see that he is shaking his head. Does that mean that the Department was not consulted or that he is frightened to intervene to confirm what many Opposition

Members believe? We believe that the oil industry and the energy sector are so disregarded by the Government that the Minister with responsibility for them is not even consulted when serious tax changes are being considered with an impact on 10,000 or more jobs, primarily in the north-east of Scotland.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): The hon. Gentleman claims to be interested in these matters. May I refer him to the answer to a similar question that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave the Select Committee?

Mr. Salmond: We should like to know what it was. Was the Minister consulted or not? We can all consult the record afterwards, but I should like an answer during the debate as many Conservative Members are wondering how to vote this evening. Surely the Minister must want to tell the Committee whether he was consulted about the tax changes in the run up to the Budget proposals. I wonder whether the silence from the Treasury Bench tells us everything. I shall not even ask whether the Scottish Office was consulted as we can safely assume that no one would bother to do that. Scottish Office Ministers are not here this evening just in case they should be asked that question.

It is unfortunate that much of the debate outside the Chamber has been conducted in terms of the cash flow of individual oil companies—which companies would benefit and which would lose. It should not be a matter of the accounting position of individual oil companies but a flesh and blood issue affecting 10,000 or more families and the infrastructure of the oil industry in north-east Scotland.

I have heard the Treasury Minister, in many radio interviews, deriding those who question the wisdom of the oil changes by arguing that we want to give some advantage to the international oil industry. What greater advantage could be given to some of the largest companies in the international oil industry, at the expense of jobs and the industrial infrastructure of our oil industry, than that given under the Government's proposals?

I am concerned about the future after the taxation changes. One argument that the Government have put forward is that it will make the North sea a more attractive province, but that argument holds only if people believe that, if oil prices were to increase rapidly at some point in the future, there would be only a corporation tax regime in place.

No one in the oil industry to whom I have spoken, whether they are for or against the changes, believes that any Government of whatever political colour would leave a taxation regime in place which meant that only corporation tax would be charged on new discoveries if, once again, there were a major escalation in oil prices. The Government have introduced instability into a tax regime having previously claimed that, above all, the United Kingdom tax regime offered stability to the industry. They have undermined their strongest argument in favour of the United Kingdom tax regime.

It is obvious that the taxation changes will be bad for the industry. Clearly, any change that is anticipated to give substantial benefits to the Treasury in net financial terms will be detrimental for the industry.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) was right to say that at the end of the day someone will have to cough up for the additional revenue that the Treasury will expect from the changes. It will not be the international oil companies; some will lose and some will gain and the ones that lose will probably explore elsewhere. I suspect that there will be a cutback and a squeeze on the service companies and that many of the effects will be felt by the workers in the industry. One consequence of a financial squeeze, as we saw in the mid-1980s, is a reduction in maintenance and work force conditions.

The exploration sector will certainly have to become more competitive, but, once again, many workers in the North sea will face a hostile environment in terms of their conditions.

In conclusion, the changes in PRT are often described as resembling the Schleswig-Holstein question in European history in that only four people understand it: one is mad, and that certainly covers the Treasury Bench, one is dead, and in political terms that would cover the Chancellor, I have forgotten the third and the fourth is Professor Alex Kemp of Aberdeen university.

Professor Kemp was the adviser to the former Energy Select Committee. In his much-quoted report, he put forward the strongest possible argument for introducing some form of transitional relief to provide protection and attempt to save the jobs that are now at risk in north-east Scotland and elsewhere. Amendment No. 40 encapsulates Professor Kemp's recommendation and I certainly commend it to both sides of the Committee this evening.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross: Our debates last night and tonight have demonstrated to those who watch and listen to our proceedings, who read our debates and who are affected by the policies we are discussing the Government's ability to unite diverse groups across political and economic backgrounds.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) catches your eye, Mr. Morris, I am sure that he will remind you that it was not long ago that the Government attempted to make the same hash of the coal industry. They consulted no one, but simply produced proposals that they considered to be in the best interests of the Government and the Coal Board. They did not worry about Britain's long-term energy needs or the impact on workers in the industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) reminded the Committee that, had there been an Energy Select Committee, it could have considered these matters. It is significant that the Government chose to introduce these changes in taxation in the knowledge that there was no Select Committee to monitor the month-by-month impact on north-east Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The changes to the PRT will impact on employment, but not only in the north-east of Scotland. It is quite likely that some 3,000 jobs in the southern sector will be lost as a direct result of those changes.

It is also clear that those who will benefit most do not need the benefits as much as we need to continue to encourage exploration and appraisal in our oil industry. Companies such as BP and Shell do not need long-term encouragement that will accrue to them as much as the exploration and appraisal companies need it if we are to continue to benefit from the North sea.

What are the likely effects of the decision on the PRT? Certainly the cost of drilling a well will be increased four

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

times as a result of the proposed changes, and that will affect the number of wells to be drilled during 1993-94. It will follow a reduction in drilling and exploration in 1991-92.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have conceded, the number of jobs that will be lost is not quite clear. It ranges between 6,000 and, depending on whose estimates we take, 20,000 to 30,000. Even the Treasury estimates that about 10,000 jobs will be lost. It will not just be jobs that are lost but, as other hon. Members have said, the expertise and knowledge will also be lost, and once it is gone, as we discovered to our cost, particularly in the manufacturing sector, it is difficult to replace.

We have also heard the Government estimates that the net benefit to the Treasury will be about £700 million in a full year. Others have argued with that figure, and I should be interested to hear from the Financial Secretary exactly what he thinks about an estimate of £200 million or £300 million rather than the £700 million suggested by the Treasury.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The hon. Gentleman need not detain the Committee long on that issue, because the Treasury's estimate of the net effect of the changes to PRT is set out in the Red Book; he will find that the figures quoted there are £300 million in 1994-95 and £400 million in 1995-96.

Mr. Ross: The Financial Secretary must admit that other financial experts disagree with those figures. Only time will tell who is right. Given the Government's record on finance, I think people are more likely to believe estimates other than those given by the Financial Secretary.

The real impact will be felt by those directly affected. The cost to this country—if we accept the estimate of 10,000 unemployed—will be approximately £90 million to £100 million in lost revenue. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) asked the Financial Secretary how, why and where the discussions that led the Financial Secretary to recommend to the Cabinet that the Chancellor should proceed had taken place. The Financial Secretary helpfully said that there had been on-going discussions over three and a half years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North said, whoever the discussions took place with, they certainly never took place with the workers in the industry and the industry itself—the Financial Secretary said that he would have needed a crystal ball to decide or second guess the likely changes in the Chancellor's Budget.

As we now know, the Department of Energy was not involved in the discussions; I am not surprised at that. Neither was the Department of Employment, which will have to find jobs for the individuals who are liable to be made redundant as a result of the changes. The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), the Minister of State, Department of Employment, appeared before the Select Committee on 14 April, and I asked him whether his Department would be responsible for finding employment for those made redundant as a direct consequence of the changes in taxation and whether his Secretary of State had been involved in discussions with the Treasury. He said no, there had been no discussion whatsoever.

Although the Government will have to find some project or scheme which will provide training, re-education and jobs for those 10,000 people, the Treasury did not consult the Department of Employment, even though it will be given the responsibility. There was no prior discussion with the Department of Energy, with the industry, with the workers in the industry or with the Department of Employment. The Financial Secretary should tell us exactly who these discussions took place with.

My hon. Friends have rightly raised the spectre of the lost jobs in the north-east of Scotland, and those who will lose their jobs should be conscious that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) are likely to support these measures. They should be aware that their unemployment, according to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside, will be a "positive response" to pressure from MPs for changes in the petroleum revenue tax which caused the unemployment. I hope it helps the unemployed, as they wend their way to the unemployment exchange, to know that a positive response made them unemployed. I am sure that there will be many people in those areas knocking on the doors of those two hon. Members, demanding that they find such people suitable alternative employment after the changes in petroleum revenue tax take effect.

My union, Manufacturing Science and Finance—which is the largest union in the oil industry—has other concerns. As hon. Members have suggested, when licences were awarded, the oil companies agreed to complete a given number of exploration wells. Those commitment wells are having to be drilled without the planned tax relief, so there will clearly be a loss to those companies. The DTI is insisting that those drilling commitments are met, and this will have a further impact on the ability of those companies to maintain employment.

It will certainly not be in the long-term interests of the country that we will have not a healthy industry, but an industry buffeted not only by economic recession—which, we are told, is not just here in this country but worldwide—but also by the impact of these changes in the exploration and appraisal tax proposals.

The White Paper on energy relied heavily on the expectation that the oil and gas sector would continue to prosper. This decision by the Treasury destroys any belief in a long-term plan for the industry. The international players in the oil business are looking for a stable fiscal background for investment. In one simple decision, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has destroyed Britain's reputation and, more importantly, shown that the Government do not understand the long-term nature of the oil industry.

The decision also sets a precedent for retrospective taxation. The commitment wells will be held to by the Department of Trade and Industry, and that will lead to further complications.

One point that has come out of this short debate is that, when such huge investments are involved, any change decided by the Government should be discussed in advance with those involved. The problems should be identified and the solutions sought before the change is gradually introduced.

I hope that other hon. Members will join the Opposition and vote for transitional arrangements which will at least offset the worst aspects of these changes.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): One of our main difficulties is the absence of an integrated energy policy. Obviously, we are a lucky nation in that we have indigenous oil, coal, gas and nuclear industries, but the taxation problem is causing unemployment.

This is a short-term affair; I can see it in no other way. Constituents write to me, asking in particular what is happening to the exploitation of exploration. An extractive industry will die if there is no investment in exploration. It is impossible to keep pumping oil up a single hole; the industry must be continually expanded. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) mentioned the threat that investors may go elsewhere: that threat is staring us in the face. Many nations have now lifted the barriers preventing multi-national companies from exploiting their resources. I am thinking especially of China. Many of the North sea companies' competitors are there already. One aspect of the industry is that those who are not there on the ground floor will lose out to a market that has potential for the future.

Another aspect of the current threat is the knock-on effect on technology. It will be our loss if we hesitate to exploit the deep parts of the North sea, the export potential for the next generation and all the facilities, know-how and equipment available because of a taxation problem. The export potential and know-how that we can give other countries is there, staring us in the face. If there is a run-down in the companies involved, or of the high-technology institutes with which such companies work, that alone could give cause for regret in the future.

I am adding my tuppence worth to the debate on the basis of what I consider to be common sense. Those who have written to me feel that, ultimately, they will pay the price for the Government's incompetence in organising an inquiry into the effects of their proposals; that cannot be tolerated. I know how I will vote tonight, and I appeal to other hon. Members to vote in the same Lobby to ensure that the Government reconsider their proposals.

My appeal is based on common sense. We want to exploit the whole of the North sea and its potential. It should not be thought for a moment that only Grampian and the north-east are affected: anyone who boards a London train to Aberdeen will see many former miners and shipyard workers from the north-east of England whose skills have been adapted for work in the North sea. Many technical people throughout the United Kingdom are affected by the cut in exploitation of resources. I hope that hon. Members will use their common sense and support the amendment.

7 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I too will curtail my remarks.

I became interested in this subject because of two constituency considerations. First, I was getting many letters from men who worked in the North sea and were concerned that their jobs were at risk. Secondly, I was aware that a large factory in my constituency, United Wire at Granton, had quite a few employees making screening equipment for use in oil drilling. Even within a few weeks of the Budget, orders for that equipment had declined by 20 per cent.

The Government may be rejoicing that at last they have hit the bottom of the big hole that they dug for themselves, but the rest of us are still worried about unemployment. In Leith, we will not be dancing in the streets because 46 people came off the claimant count last month; we still have over 5,000 officially unemployed. My first concern is to make sure that no more people lose their jobs.

We have heard about other parts of Scotland being worse affected. My main question is to find out the Minister's estimate of the number of jobs likely to be lost because of the tax change. Is he sticking by the much-quoted press release of 1 April, which mentioned 10,000? Another way of putting the question is to ask him whether he agrees with Professor Kemp.

I accept that Professor Kemp says different things. There may be room for small changes in the tax regime, but the main thrust of Professor Kemp's report is that about 10,000 jobs will be lost. I intended to go into his report in more detail, but because of the shortage of time I will leave it.

Does the Minister go along with what small businesses are saying? The Government claim to support small businesses. Those businesses want to know what will happen to the licences they have. Will they have to proceed with them? Does the Minister realise that small businesses are saying that they will go to other parts of the world where the tax regime is favourable?

Why is it always BP which is quoted by Conservative Members? I think that BP is the only source which has been quoted more than Professor Kemp in the debate. BP, which stands to gain £150 million from the tax change, has been abandoning new exploration in the North sea for a long time. Of course a company can be a winner under the new regime if it does not want to explore. It was misleading for the Minister to quote the new BP development, because it has a contract for that, and it will still get tax relief on it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) asked, would the company have initiated the development under the tax regime?

Unemployment is our main concern, but many points about the proposal are reminiscent of problems which the Government have run into over the years. There is the short-term nature of the decision, as with so many other economic decisions. The Government seem to be saying, "Let us do something that will bring in money." It is connected with the problem of the public sector borrowing requirement. As with yesterday's debate, the tax proposal seems to be an easy way of solving the problem without regard to the long-term consequences.

Many of the mistakes which the Government have made in their economic policy are being repeated in this measure. One quarter of United Kingdom manufacturing investment is in the North sea. The low level of manufacturing investment has been a key problem under the Government, yet they are prepared to let that decline, with the result that overseas investment by companies will increase. Encouragement of overseas investment has been a feature of the Government for the last 14 years.

Even considering the matter in terms of revenue, if fewer new fields are developed, that will reduce revenue and exacerbate the fundamental balance of payments problem, to which the Government have not sought any solution. Many problems will be made worse by the measure. The main problem is that it will increase unemployment, which is still far too high in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I understand the pressure of time, but it is important to put on record that the changes will not just affect the east coast of Scotland, north-east and south-east, but will have a major impact on the west coast. The impact on the west coast may not be so great in terms of loss of income or the volume of jobs, but it may be disproportionately greater in relation to what those jobs mean for a fragile area such as the west coast.

There are direct and indirect implications. The direct implication involves people from the west coast who are employed offshore in the North sea and companies on the west coast that service part of the North sea sector. One of the most important, if not the most important, is in my constituency. The fabrication yard at Arnish, just outside Stornoway, opened in the mid-70s and closed in the late 80s when the company, Hereema, pulled out. Subsequently there was a management buyout. Under the local managers, and with the help, support and hard work of the work force, the yard has prospered, employing up to 200 people on average. That is a large number in view of the fragile economy of the Western Isles.

The quality of the jobs is as important as the number. In a rural economy dominated by agriculture and fishing, it is valuable to have highly skilled engineering jobs, filled 95 per cent. by local workers. Small yards such as that are likely to be the worst affected by the changes. Small yards will not pick up orders from companies like BP. They get orders from the smaller exploration companies which will be hardest hit by the changes.

As to the indirect effect, people from the west coast work in the North sea sector but they send their earnings home. That money plays a vital part in maintaining the economic health of the west coast.

One final factor is even more indirect—the potential impact on future exploration and development of oil and gas reserves off the west coast of Scotland, if they prove to be substantial. Some companies have expressed great interest in extending their activities to the west coast. Areas such as the Western Isles could gain greatly from that development. The companies providing services and supplies would probably not be as sophisticated as those that have sprung up on the east coast, but even if they were moderate sized they would have a beneficial effect on the fragile economy of the west coast.

It is deeply irresponsible of the Government to threaten the exploration and development potential of the west coast of Scotland. Did the Government take account of the longer-term effect? BP is showing great interest in the western continental shelf. It will turn out to be one of the winners from the changes. But I wonder whether BP will put its winnings into exploration and development off the west coast, given the effect of the changes. Did the Government even consult BP to find out exactly what the implications of the changes would be on the company's plans for developing off the west coast?

The jobs impact on the west coast of Scotland may seem relatively small in the context of 10,000 job losses overall, but it will have a huge and disproportionate impact on the west coast if exploration activity is seriously threatened by the changes. I join other hon. Members in asking the Government to reconsider the whole issue, especially the prospect of a transitional regime, and at least give a commitment that if things turn out badly for the industry as a result of the changes in the coming year or two, they will review the matter again.

Mr. Dorrell: It is common ground in the Committee that we are debating important changes with important implications for the structure of the oil industry in the medium and long term.

I begin by answering directly the hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and others. I can tell them clearly and in terms that the changes are the result of a substantial programme of work that involved consultation between the Treasury, the Inland Revenue, the Department of Trade and Industry and, before that, the Department of Energy.

The work was carefully prepared and the conclusions were reached by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the basis of that work. The common ground, shared in all parts of the Committee, is a desire to ensure that we have in the North sea a stable fiscal regime that is attractive to the operators in the North sea and the supply industry. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) about the importance of ensuring that we have in this country an environment that encourages the development of competition in the oil companies and the supply sectors.

No one can believe that the present system can properly be described as stable. The basic facts about the system are well known and on the record. In 1991-92, something that we call a tax cost the Exchequer £216 million. In 1992-93, it raised the princely sum of £54 million. So, in the last two years for which figures are available, the tax cost the Exchequer £162 million.

The reason for that in large measure can be attributed to development of the use of the exploration and appraisal relief well beyond anything that was envisaged when the relief was originally introduced. When it was introduced in 1983, the budget estimate was that it would have a revenue cost of £40 million. The cost in the most recent year was £700 million.

I stand absolutely by what I said in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North: any serious analysis of the present North sea fiscal regime must conclude that it is in need of change. That was obvious to me when I took over responsibility for the matter 12 months ago, and I think it was equally obvious to the oil companies and oil industry representatives who have been coming into my office in that 12-month period to talk about ideas for the evolution of the North sea fiscal regime.

I do not apologise for giving my view on Second Reading that I do not believe it is right for the Treasury to engage in direct formal dicussions about the future of tax rates and tax allowances in the system. That leads to serious distortions in economic behaviour, partly through companies responding to what they perceive to be a threat to the regime and partly through financial markets seeking to discount and second-guess what tax changes are likely.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington that it is sensible for Ministers to engage in a discussion about the detail of rates and allowances. It is clear to me that any serious analysis of the North sea fiscal regime over the past two years must conclude that it is a system in need of reform.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister talked about a series of consultations, but I question whether many oil industry representatives were aware that they were taking part in

consultations. He also talked of departmental consultations. He did not mention the Scottish Office. Was that a deliberate omission, or did he just forget it?

7.15 pm

Mr. Dorrell: The sponsoring Department for the oil industry was the Department of Energy, now the Department of Trade and Industry. The purpose of the interdepartmental discussions was to ensure that the decision—which rests properly with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—was made on the basis of proper knowledge. That knowledge was available to him and his decision was based on a proper appraisal of the alternatives.

Let us examine the substance and detail of the present position. We have a paper tax rate of 75 per cent. for the petroleum revenue tax. That is having the effect, in my view, of depressing development activity and potentially shortening field life, because it is uniquely the highest marginal rate of tax collected anywhere in our fiscal system now.

Mr. Darling: Will the Minister explain what will be the benefit of the changes? He talked about the savings, but one must take into account the PRT that will not be collected. What calculations has he made of the cost of 10,000 people losing their jobs? Can we be given an overall picture of what the position will be from the taxpayer's point of view?

Mr. Dorrell: I gave the figure in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Dundee, West. I pointed out that the Red Book contained a projection for 1994-95 of £300 million and for 1995-96 of £400 million, being the net yield from the changes.

The 75 per cent. PRT rate is recycled into exploration and appraisal, so in many cases the taxpayer is meeting 83 per cent., if corporation tax is included—that is, 75 per cent. PRT plus 33 per cent. corporation tax—of the cost of exploration and appraisal in the North sea. But as most of the fields currently being found will not pay PRT—because of the effect of the allowances—the taxpayer's share of the return on those fields, if they are found and developed, amounts to 33 per cent. In other words, the Treasury is signing the taxpayer up to a deal under which the taxpayer contributes 83 per cent. of the equity in return for 33 per cent. of the return.

That fundamental distortion leads to the tax subsidies which my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) was right to deplore. I believe that if a project is uneconomic, it is no part of the job of the tax system to make that uneconomic activity appear economic. That is the result of the PRT system as it now exists.

Another principle of the reform which I hold to be important is that if the existing system will not raise any tax, we do well to admit it. It seems nonsensical to talk about PRT in the context of a range of fields when it is common ground on the part of all who have examined the issue that it is a PRT system that will not produce any yield from most of the fields currently being explored.

If there is to be no yield, it is better to admit it and abolish the tax. The only purpose of keeping the tax, if there is to be no yield, is to provide an excuse for paying tax allowances. It seems the ultimate absurdity, which is the position that the amendment would provide, to maintain a tax system not with the object of collecting tax but to pay out allowances.

If we want to pay a subsidy to a particular sector, by all means let us do so, but it should be properly justified, not brought in under the guise of a tax system.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that those of us who agree that there is a case for reform and are calling for transitional arrangements are worried that the long-term disincentive to exploration will mean that the Treasury and the economy will lose out because some oil fields may not be found? It is important to ensure a viable incentive to encourage oil companies to explore in the United Kingdom rather then elsewhere.

Mr. Dorrell: I am coming to the effect of the changes on exploration, which is an important point mentioned by several hon. Members. Before doing so, I want to draw the Committee's attention to something mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who does not uncritically support every aspect of the proposals. It was he who drew attention to the fact that there is striking unanimity in the industry on the point that the principles behind the long-term changes that we want to introduce are right.

I should like to quote not, as might be predicted, BP but a number of other companies. Mobil says:

"We believe that the changes proposed to the North Sea fiscal regime are well-founded and in the long-term interest of the industry and of the nation."

Amoco's view of the changes

"is one of welcome for their general thrust."

Marathon

"is supportive of the direction being taken. We believe that in the long term the development of UKCS oil and gas resources will benefit from these changes."

Shell UK believes

"that the thrust of the changes is correct."

The industry's association, the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, says:

"There is agreement that the reduction of the PRT rate and the elimination of PRT for new fields is a welcome step which will be positive to enhancing productivity from existing large mature fields and to the development of new fields."

There is thus widespread recognition that the long-term effect of the changes will be to make the tax and fiscal regime in the North sea much more rational than the system that it replaces.

Several hon. Members have sought to concentrate on how we arrange the transition from the system as it is to the system that we want to create. I turn now to the transitional arrangements which the Government considered ahead of the Budget and for which we have provided in the Finance Bill. We must test proposals for transitional arrangements in two ways. First, as the new structure seems to be more rational and likely to lead to a better use of resources in the economy, it is important that the transitional regime delivers the change surely, so that there is no doubt that we will reach the end result reasonably quickly. Secondly, and equally important, we want the changes delivered with the minimum dislocation. I acknowledge that some dislocation from changes on this scale is inevitable, but we want a method of introducing them that minimises it.

Before we engage in a sensible discussion of the precise structure of transitional arrangements, I should add that I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington and by the hon. Member for Edinburgh,

[Mr. Dorrell]

Leith (Mr. Chisholm)—we must make an assessment of the effect of the proposed changes on employment and especially on exploration. That will tell us the size of the transitional problem with which we need to deal.

A number of factors are relevant in this context. First, four companies in the North sea together represent 40 per cent. of all exploration and appraisal activity there. They have publicly committed themselves to no reduction in E and A. The four are Shell, Esso, Mobil and BP. Secondly, 40 per cent. of current exploration and appraisal activity does not benefit at all from E and A relief from PRT. That being so, I am at a loss to understand how the withdrawal of the relief can lead to companies cutting short their E and A programmes. There is some overlap between the two categories, but as 40 per cent. of activity has been committed to being maintained and a different 40 per cent. is not benefiting from the relief that we are withdrawing, the worst case that we posited—a 50 per cent. reduction in exploration and appraisal—is, as I told an Aberdeen newspaper, improbably pessimistic.

I am reinforced in that belief by the evidence of what is going on in the present 14th licensing round. I understand that the Department of Trade and Industry told companies that had put in bids in the 14th round after the Budget that if, in the light of the Budget changes, they wanted to withdraw or change their bids, they were free to do so. Only a minimal number of companies have taken up that opportunity. So here we have a clear market test of the likely effect on exploration; it reinforces my view that it is profoundly unlikely to be anything like as serious as most of the worst case scenarios would suggest.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is telling us that everything will be all right and we should not worry too much. Can he offer the Committee anything comparable to the thoroughness and academic rigour of Professor Kemp's study? If not, would we not be best advised to proceed on the conclusion of the professor's analysis?

Mr. Dorrell: I have given the Committee the basis on which I am working. Professor Kemp came to see me this morning and I asked him for the basis on which the reduction in wells had been posited in the most recent document. He said that that had to be a matter of judgment—his words, not mine. I have provided the Committee with the evidence on which we have reached our conclusion that a 50 per cent. reduction in the level of exploration is improbable, and it is not the only factor acting on employment and total levels of activity in the economy associated with the North sea.

I say that that is not the only factor, because it altogether omits the fact that the reduction in the PRT rate from 75 per cent. to 50 per cent. has the effect of doubling the post-tax return of all development activity and all current activity in producing fields. It was precisely that effect that led BP yesterday, in announcing its £1·5 billion development programme, to say, not that the programme was dreamt up after 16 March—of course it was not—but that, against the background of the Budget changes, its enhanced development programme was "made more likely" by those Budget changes.

If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) prefers an alternative quotation, the company said that the programme was "given a significant impetus" by the Budget changes. I ask the Committee to recognise that, for oil companies considering development activity or the life of their existing producing fields, it is wildly improbable that the doubling of the post-tax rate of return will have no effect whatever on those two indicators of activity.

It was against that background that we carefully considered the transitional arrangements that should apply to get us from where we are to where we want to be. Three choices were suggested to us, and I will consider them briefly in turn. First, it was suggested from some quarters that we should protect obligation wells. That case was argued by very few companies—indeed, by almost none of the companies that have been to see me—and it is easy to see why. The bids that were put in during earlier licensing rounds, as in this one, were invited on the basis of a proper economic assessment, and the companies that submitted them overwhelmingly made their judgments on the basis of such assessments.

I was asked about obligations. Our position was made abundantly clear in a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy to UKOOA, dated 22 April, in which, speaking for the Government collectively, he said:

> "I regard the drilling obligations entered into as binding, and I expect these to be honoured . . .
>
> Of course, this does not exclude adjustments to particular wells in a drilling programme. We have always been prepared to consider, for example, the rephasing of individual wells on a case by case basis, having regard to technical or other specific arguments for change. But it was not our intention at the time of the Budget that there should be any general reinterpretation of the licensing obligations along the lines UKOOA appear to suggest."

That is clearly the position on obligation wells.

7.30 pm

The second suggestion is that we should phase changes in the tax rates and the allowances. My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington saw some attraction in that approach. It seems to me that the problem is that, by delaying the PRT cut, we should be delaying precisely the incentive to which BP responded yesterday, while creating a powerful incentive for exploration companies to bring forward activity to benefit from the more generous allowances that would prevail—but prevail under notice. It would clearly be in the interests of the companies to act now rather than later, in order to benefit from a tax concession that we would have announced was being phased out.

Some hon. Members have said that that can be dealt with by capping. It seems to me that that illustrates the unattractiveness of that course. I am reminded of the common agricultural policy. It is acknowledged that a distortion is being introduced, but we are told not to worry as another distortion can be introduced to control the first one. That is not a very attractive way of designing a tax policy.

It is for those reasons that I prefer the third approach to transition. I refer to the Government's approach, as set out in the Finance Bill, which is based on existing contractual obligations. We have said that the changes will be phased, in the sense that, although E and A relief for new fields is being abolished from 16 March, the rate cut will take effect from 1 July. That has provided my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer with up to £200 million gross for transitional relief, based on the existing contractual commitments of the supply companies

operating in the North sea—precisely those most likely to be damaged by over-abrupt change in the tax system. That was the conclusion of our careful review, and it remains so.

I started by stressing the importance of stability in the fiscal regime. We carefully considered all the choices. We believe that this structure is robust for all likely scenarios regarding oil discoveries and oil prices. No doubt the detail of the proposal can be examined in Committee. We shall have plenty of opportunity for such examination. I believe that the structure of this proposal is the result of a serious programme of work. It is one in which the Committee and the industry can have confidence, and I recommend that the amendments be rejected.

Mr. Darling: The Committee can be in no doubt about the Government's position: there are to be no concessions on this measure. The Minister has not even disputed the fact that at least 10,000 jobs will be lost as a result of the Bill. I understand that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is a former Tory party agent. Tonight, he must choose between the interests of the Conservative party and the interests of his constituents. Last night, he voted for an increase in the taxes of his constituents. If he votes with the Government tonight, he will be supporting a measure that will result in many of them losing their jobs. The hon. Gentleman's attitude stands in stark contrast to that of his hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who at least recognise that there will be transitional problems. But the Government have made it absolutely clear that they are not prepared to meet the legitimate demands of people involved in the industry and those living in communities affected by these proposals, who want some sort of relief.

The Government have not disputed the fact that exploration will be affected. It was astounding to hear the Minister pray in aid of this proposal Shell, Esso, Mobil and BP, which, he says, are committed to having no reduction. How can any Government rely on the best intentions of a company, stated just after the announcement of a Budget measure? It is the Government's duty to take into account the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole rather than the interests of a few oil companies. The measure will undoubtedly benefit some oil companies, as we have said during this debate. However, there is a substantial risk that exploration will be exported from the United Kingdom waters to other parts of the world, with the result that the natural resource we have in the North sea and in our Atlantic waters will be lost. There is no dispute about the fact that, because of the traumatic disruption caused by the Chancellor's announcement, jobs will go. The Government have made it absolutely clear that there is to be no transitional relief.

To those Conservative Members who have said in the Chamber today, as well as to their constituents by way of radio and television and the other media, that they are not happy with the Government's position I say that they now have a very clear choice. If they want to support the interests of the North sea oil industry and this country's long-term energy interests, they will have to vote for Labour's amendment. By voting with the Government they will shut the door on any hope for the industry. They have nowhere to hide, and I invite them to join us in the Lobby.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 253, Noes 289.

Division No. 262] **[7.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew

McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'da E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Redwood, John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 40, in page 137, line 36, at end insert 'or–

(c) one in which in whole or in part, a commitment to a programme of Exploration and Appraisal drilling was undertaken under the terms of a licence agreement and approved by the Secretary of State before that date, where the field participants elect to so classify the oil field and to accept a diminishing percentage of allowable expenditure on exploration and appraisal to be offset against PRT and a ceiling on the amount allowed for each company as allowable expenditure for PRT relief; the percentage, the timescale and the ceiling to be determined by the Secretary of State and approved by the affirmative resolution of each House of Parliament.'.
—[Mr. Salmond.]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 250, Noes 287.

Division No. 283] **[7.49 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert

Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.
Clause 183 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 48

Bad Debts

8 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move amendment No. 41, in page 29, line 32, leave out 'six' and insert 'three'.

The purpose of the amendment is to allow businesses to recover more quickly the output VAT that they accounted for when making supply to a customer where the debt proves to be bad. It provides the opportunity for us to discuss more generally the extent of bad debt and its serious consequences for small businesses in particular, which make the measure all the more necessary.

Let me make it clear at the outset that we welcome the fact that the clause proposes to reduce the waiting period from one year to six months, which will be of benefit to businesses large and small. As firms that are not in the cash accounting scheme for VAT—I shall return to that scheme in due course—become liable for VAT when they send out invoices, but only get the money back when their customers pay them, which in some cases is never, the provisions have serious consequences for business cash flows.

We believe that, given the comment before the Budget —for example, in the *Financial Times* of 8 March speculating on the benefit of immediate relief on bad debt, given that the CBI was calling for relief on bad debt to be immediately available when provision is made in the traders' account—we feel that the Government may be being unnecessarily cautious in moving only to six months and we should like to press the case for three months instead. That would give a cash flow benefit to small businesses in addition to that estimated by the Chancellor in the Budget.

Such a measure is especially important at a time when bankruptcies are running at such a high level. Dun and Bradstreet reports that in the first quarter of this year there were no fewer than 15,443 businesses collapsing—a 3·8 per cent. increase on the same period last year. In those circumstances, bad debts themselves become a principal cause of business failure. There is a vicious circle. Firms that do not receive payment find it increasingly difficult to meet their own debts. That compounds the problem and if such firms are not themselves pitched into bankruptcy or liquidation—as, sadly, many are—they are at the very least more likely to join the legions of late payers, stoking up the overall burden of corporate debt overhang, itself aggravated by high real interest rates, which make forced inter-company credit the borrowing of first resort. That exerts financial stress throughout the business network to the point where those unlucky or adventurous enough to be the weakest links in the chain then break, with knock-on consequences all round.

I think that it is now generally acknowledged that that is an extremely serious problem, not only in the United Kingdom but, as Michael Cassell reported in the *Financial Times* of 23 February, throughout the European Community, where the problem has become steadily worse as the recession has deepened. Michael Cassel reported the Association of British Factors and Discounters estimate of the time taken for European companies to pay as having increased by on average no less than one third in 1992. That is borne out by a disturbing report in today's *Financial Times*. Apparently, a survey by NCM Credit Insurance shows that

"One in five UK companies lost money as a result of non-payment by an EC customer in the year ended March 1993, compared with one in eight in the year to March 1989."

Clearly, that augurs badly for British companies looking to the EC for business which Britain so desperately needs given the yawning balance of payments deficit.

All of that places a very real premium on the help that the Government can give as regards domestic late payments and VAT on bad debts. After all, in both cases, firms are merely trying to get back more quickly the money that is due to them.

We welcome the CBI prompt payers' code and hope that the CBI is successful in getting a much larger proportion of its membership to sign up to it. We believe, too, that the Government should be setting an example both in public sector payments and through their readiness to legislate where that would be of benefit.

It is an absolute disgrace that the Property Services Agency, being fattened up for privatisation, was revealed by the Public Accounts Committee to be making contractors wait months for payment because of delays by the Ministry of Defence in paying it. *The Guardian* obtained an internal PSA newsletter called "Paid when Paid", which revealed that the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, no less, was expecting companies to wait 44 days for payment in connection with defence, prison, courts and royal palace contracts, in contravention of the 30-day maximum target that the Chancellor of the Exchequer set in his Budget last year.

It is not enough for the Government simply to require Departments to publish details of their payments performance in their departmental reports. Although that is all well and good in itself, it does not give any immediate incentive to recalcitrant Departments, nor does it offer redress to contractors waiting for bills to be paid by those Departments. As the Government operate a system of penalties for businesses that are late in paying their VAT, why not apply a system of penalties—perhaps precisely the same penalties—to Government Departments that are late in paying their bills to businesses?

If that were brought in as an automatic supplement to which the trader would have a legal right, it would not only be seen to be fair but would offer some automatic compensation to the trader, would set a good example and

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

would concentrate minds wonderfully in the Department concerned. It would show that the Government were prepared to match their words, which are cheap, with actions which might not be so cheap. I am sure that it would be welcomed by the business community.

The other important question to which the debate gives rise is why more small businesses do not take advantage of the cash accounting scheme which enables smaller businesses to account for VAT on the basis of payments received and made rather than the usual liability on the basis of invoices issued and received.

The Customs and Excise press notice issued on 16 March estimated that only about 40 per cent. of those traders who could benefit from the scheme were doing so. So although the announcement in the Budget that the threshold for eligibility for the scheme is to be raised from £300,000 to £350,000 and entry is to be made easier is to be welcomed, if small businesses are to derive the full benefit of the scheme and thereby escape the perils of late payment, we need to be assured that early action is in prospect on the outcome of the consultation exercise that is under way. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us how soon the Government expect to be able to implement measures to improve take-up and ease of entry to the scheme.

I should be grateful if the Paymaster General could tell us whether any specific effort has been made to survey the 60 per cent. of eligible businesses to find out why they are not using the system. That is an obvious step to take. It may well be that the answer to that question—why businesses are not using the scheme—which does not appear on the Customs and Excise consultation paper on the operation of the scheme, is pertinent and the right route to finding a way towards higher take-up and thereby more benefits to small businesses in Britain.

Small businesses have been going through a difficult time. The VAT regime is often experienced as a real headache, making things harder for business rather than easier. We do not dispute that there are a number of measures in the Finance Bill that will help small businesses. We advocated those measures, and they are to be welcomed.

The Government need to accept that there is a long way to go as far as small businesses are concerned. That was underlined in a timely fashion by the publication today of a report by Grant Thornton which surveyed the opinions on economic prospects of small and medium-sized enterprises across the European Community. The report makes sorry reading. When such reports are published, it is important to underline that they do not tell the whole story about Britain's small businesses—many of them are thriving against all the odds. Labour Members certainly have no interest in talking down prospects for our small firms—we acknowledge that many are doing well.

The survey shows that many small businesses are gloomy about their prospects. The Press Association report on the survey says:

"Britain's small and medium-sized businesses are among the gloomiest in the EC about future prospects . . . there is pessimism about turnover, employment and investment—and Britain is the only country where research and development spending is expected to fall. It also has the weakest forecast for spending on training".

The survey, which covered 5,000 businesses throughout the Community, underlines the severity of the problems which firms in Britain and elsewhere in the Community face with late payments. There seemed to be vulnerability to pressures on finance arising from the problem of late payers.

The widening skills gap is underlined in the report. That is one area where the United Kingdom comes out badly. It is bad news at a time when small businesses in Britain need help with upskilling their employees and with the advice available to the management of small firms. Another relevant outcome of the survey is that the size of management teams in small firms in Britain is, on average, much greater than that of their European competitors. That inevitably means that a higher proportion of costs is spent on management, with a consequent undermining of competitiveness.

The findings of the survey bear out everything that the Labour party has been saying about the need for the British economy to have more investment in infrastructure and skills and more support for our small businesses. The Paymaster General should tell the Committee what action the Government will take on the findings of the survey. He should also respond to the question which he did not have an opportunity to answer in the turmoil and somewhat torrid time that he was having at the end of yesterday's debate: what will be the effect of the increase in VAT on small firms—those businesses that people have started from home which are not paying any VAT on their fuel at present because they do not use more than 40 per cent. of their fuel consumption for business purposes? The imposition of VAT on fuel will hit those small businesses. The Paymaster General owes the Committee an explanation as to how the Government can possibly impose that measure on those businesses. He also owes the firms involved an apology.

8.15 pm

If the Government want small businesses to thrive, they must take action. As I suggested, they need to act to improve the overall economic position and climate that small businesses face. They also need to act specifically with regard to the consequences of bad debts for creditor firms. There are other provisions in the Bill with regard to small businesses, and we shall have a good deal to say about them—notably, the provisions relating to the VAT penalty regime and the right of recourse to VAT tribunals.

The Government need to take action to tackle the underlying causes which are giving rise to escalating bad debts. Those causes are fundamentally to be found in the consequences of recession and the fragility of recovery which still sees 1,200 businesses going under every week. Unemployment still casts an unacceptably long shadow over prospects for business recovery because of the greatly depressed purchasing power of the unemployed and because the fear of unemployment continues to corrode general confidence. Labour Members must stress the importance of tackling the causes of business failure and bad debt as well as the symptoms.

Small businesses add up to big business and they deserve every support. Labour's policies to that end are being developed further in consultation with small businesses. The key elements on which the construction of a supportive framework for small businesses need to focus

were spelt out by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) in a speech to the Small Business Development conference in April.

Those elements are, first, finance—the need to free small businesses from dependency on short-term and expensive finance and from excessive exposure to personal risk by encouraging longer-term financial support and an equity share on the part of banks. Secondly, there must be improved advice and encouragement for the development of managerial skills. I have already referred to that matter in the context of the Grant Thornton survey. Thirdly, there must be better support for technology transfer, technological innovation and bringing new ideas to the market place. We believe that, with a supportive fiscal framework and a proper overall strategy for economic growth, infrastructure, investment and training, small businesses will have an even more important role to play in securing Britain's economic recovery and sustainable prosperity.

With regard to the specific provisions in clause 48, a further reduction, to three months, in the elapsed time for eligibility for VAT bad debt relief would give more help to the cash flow of many businesses, thereby staunching job losses and boosting confidence and recovery. I commend the amendment to the Committee.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): It might be helpful to the Committee if I intervene at this point to talk specifically about clause 48 and the amendment. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) ranged a good deal wider than that to other subjects relating to small businesses. I may refer to some of those wider aspects at the end of the debate if I have a further opportunity.

The Committee will appreciate that the Government have given a good deal of attention to the problems of VAT and small businesses, especially in relation to bad debts, over the past year that I have been doing this job and, indeed, under my predecessor. I have long been involved in the support of small businesses. I am anxious to ensure that VAT is fairly operated and takes account of the difficulties of businesses, especially cash flow difficulties.

Customs and Excise has experienced increased bad debts in the form of VAT arrears. That is not surprising in a time of recession. The House may have seen from the Customs and Excise annual report covering the last fiscal year, which was published not long ago, that arrears increased, in spite of some special measures, from 4·2 to 4·4 per cent. The Public Accounts Committee has rightly and fairly criticised those arrears.

It is essential, if we are to be fair to those who pay their VAT on time, that we collect the VAT due from their competitors as promptly as possible. It is not fair to the majority for us to allow a minority to postpone their obligations, particularly in cases where the trader has collected the VAT from his own customers—I am thinking especially of retail businesses—and then fails to hand it over to the Customs and Excise when it is due.

Conversely, we also recognise the problems of some traders, especially when they have not been paid by their customers. That is the problem to which the clause is directed. As the hon. Member for Oxford, East correctly said, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken two specific measures in the Budget to help people in that position. First, he has widened and improved the cash accounting scheme. Secondly, he has made bad debts easier to write off for VAT purposes.

The promised improvements in the cash accounting scheme can be put in place by order and administrative action. They do not require clauses in the Finance Bill. So there will not be an opportunity to mention them at another stage. The threshold has been raised to a turnover of £350,000 per annum. Traders whose turnover rises up to 25 per cent. above that can remain in the scheme until they come out of the top end. All that takes place under the VAT (Cash Accounting) (Amendment) Regulations 1993, which took effect on 1 April 1993.

Not only that statistical change has occurred. We have also made changes to the arrangements for the scheme so that any trader whose turnover is below the new threshold can automatically use the cash accounting system without having to apply for and receive approval, as he previously did. Clearly, if it turns out that he was not eligible, he has to put the matter right later. We have tried to get rid of the bureaucracy involved in signing up to the cash accounting scheme.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East asked me about the consultation with the trade organisations, which is now in progress. We have asked for responses to the consultation by 31 May. We shall consider carefully the responses that we receive as soon as possible thereafter.

We have done a certain amount to publicise the cash accounting scheme especially to new traders. The packs for new traders include advertisements explaining the scheme and the other schemes available to traders. Further details are offered to anyone who is interested to know more. We have drawn the scheme to the attention of practitioners, banks and so on, so that they can advise clients about the scheme and tell them to take advantage of it, if it is desirable and if they wish to do so. We have conducted various exercises to publicise the scheme among traders who might wish to benefit from it.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East mulled over why more traders who, on paper, are eligible for the scheme do not take it up. When one ponders the matter one sees that there are some fairly obvious reasons why some do not choose to take up the scheme. First, the retail schemes and other related schemes for retailers are better for some small businesses. It is not necessary for them to take up the cash accounting scheme to obtain similar benefits or benefits that they consider more desirable in making their arrangements for VAT. For some traders who take cash over the counter, there is no advantage in the cash accounting scheme in dealing with bad debts.

If one does business for cash, by definition one does not have any bad debts—unless one takes some dud notes—so some people do not become involved in the cash accounting scheme. It may be better for some traders from the input point of view not to be in the cash accounting scheme, depending how promptly they pay their suppliers and whether supplies are provided on credit.

Some traders find that the Inland Revenue cash accounting scheme does not blend as easily as it might with the VAT cash accounting scheme. They prefer not to be involved in the VAT scheme, for that reason. Some additional accounting is required to keep the accounts on the basis that we require—necessarily, I believe—so that we can operate the scheme with due regard to the revenue.

Apart from the cash accounting scheme, which is highly desirable and which we have improved and extended in the

[Sir John Cope]

Budget, my right hon. Friend and I were also anxious to improve the position of those who have bad debts and are VAT traders. That is the reason for clause 48 and the provisions that we are considering.

The present scheme was introduced by section 11 of the Finance Act 1990. Before then, there was a scheme of VAT relief for bad debts. It depended on the formal insolvency of the debtor. That led to difficulties. Apart from anything else, it provided a VAT incentive to traders to go through the formal insolvency procedures to get back the VAT, and for no other reason. That was correctly regarded as an unnecessary incentive to go through the formal insolvency procedures. That was partly why the new scheme was introduced in the Finance Act 1990.

Initially, the cash accounting scheme provided eligibility for relief on all debts in respect of supplies that were made after 1 April 1989 which were two years old and were written off in the trader's accounts.

A clawback provision still exists in respect of belated payments received by claimants. A debt may be regarded as bad at a certain time, but the trader may still chase it and he may succeed in getting some of the money back. We would obviously need to recover the VAT in that case.

The waiting period was reduced from two years to one year before the scheme came into full effect under section 15 of the Finance Act 1991. The new scheme has been generally welcomed and it has been discussed in the House and in Committee on a number of occasions. Representations have been made, however, from professional and business organisations and individuals about the fact that the waiting period is too long. Given the recession, those representations have had greater validity because of the cash flow problems that have thus been caused. We have responded to those representations with the proposal in the Bill to reduce the waiting period from one year to six months.

8.30 pm

The decision to halve the waiting period is a reflection of the attention paid to the representations made and significantly enhances a scheme that has already led to a major improvement for businesses chasing bad debts. The one-year cost of the scheme—it is only one year because the scheme brings forward the time at which bad debts are written off—is estimated at £150 million. In other words, the cash flow of those businesses affected by bad debt has been improved by £150 million as a result of the Government's efforts in the current financial year.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East has suggested that we should reduce the waiting period from six months to three months, but I do not believe that it would be wise to pursue that proposal. If it is possible to write off a bad debt too soon after that debt is incurred, the necessary provisions will become unduly bureaucratic and difficult. The necessary clawback of debts paid after the end of the proposed 90-day period would increase considerably.

We must remember that different types of businesses use different credit arrangements. Credit of 90 days is not unusual in some lines of business. If the amendment of the hon. Member for Oxford, East were accepted, it would mean that every debt that was more than one day or a week outstanding after 90 days could be written off for VAT. That VAT would then need to be clawed back at a later date.

I should make it clear that any waiting period, be it six months or, were we to accept the amendment, which I do not recommend, three months, runs from the day of supply. It runs from when the goods are delivered and the invoice arrives. The period does not run from when the credit allowed by the supplier has expired. I do not believe that VAT should be written off as early as three months after the date of supply, because that would add to the control problems of Customs and Excise when managing write-offs. It is necessary to establish that a debt is genuinely bad. Just because someone has been a bit dilatory in coming up with the money does not make for a bad debt. That is why the waiting period of six months is appropriate.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Why is it more difficult to validate that the debt is a genuine bad debt when it is reclaimed after three months rather than after six? Surely the same evidence will be available for the VAT inspectors.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the increased bureaucracy that that shorter period would impose on a business. I certainly do not see why the VAT inspectors or businesses should be subject to any more bureaucracy. If a business wanted to operate a 90-day or an even longer credit system, it would have that choice under our proposals. It would be up to businesses to decide whether to reclaim VAT after three months, six months or longer. Although our amendment would enable businesses to make a claim after three months, it would not preclude them, from choice, from deciding to wait longer, if they operate an extended system of credit. Surely our amendment gives business more choice than the right hon. Gentleman has tried to suggest.

Sir John Cope: Yes, in some senses it does, but a business will have to decide whether to place itself at a disadvantage in comparison with some of its competitors by not reclaiming the VAT as soon as it could, as proposed under the hon. Gentleman's amendment. At the same time, a business would have to be sure that it got its clawback right. From our point of view and that of Customs and Excise, we would also need to try to be sure that no bad debt that had been written off at the end of three months had not been paid afterwards. From a technical point of view, that is quite a difficult thing to do. I speak as a former auditor who had to go over transactions and find out what happened. Sometimes it is difficult to be certain that a debt has not been paid belatedly.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East picked up my phrase about validating a debt as genuinely bad. There is no validation of the kind to which he referred, for example through the production of some documents to demonstrate that a debt is bad. The only validation that is required under the scheme is the length of time during which the debt has been in existence; in other words, from the date of supply until the six months period has expired. Providing that the debt has been outstanding for six months, no further validation in terms of documents is required.

For the scheme to be simple and easy to operate from the point of view of the trader and Customs and Excise, it is wise that a simple period of time should elapse. That provides reasonable protection and it is not necessary to

provide further validation. That is why I believe that the period should be set at six months as opposed to three months.

At the time of the review of bad debt relief in 1988, when the scheme was introduced, an extensive consultation exercise was undertaken. Most of those who replied accepted the need for a waiting period and their views on the length of that period ranged from a maximum of two years, which is what the Government then introduced, to a minimum of six months. At that stage, no one requested a waiting period of three months and there has been no pressure for it since.

The expressed wish of those who were consulted is met by clause 48. To guard against the danger of fraudulent abuse, particularly by associated companies and connected persons—we must always think about those who would try to use, for fraudulent reasons, provisions in the tax law that were introduced for genuine reasons—six months is the right waiting period for the scheme.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East referred to quite a number of other, wider matters. I may respond to them more fully later, if time allows. In connection with the late payment of debt and the Government's own position, Government accounting now requires Departments to pay bills promptly in accordance with the terms of the contract or within 30 days of the receipt of goods and services or presentation of a valid invoice, whichever is the later, if no other terms are specified.

The Chancellor announced in his 1992 Budget that prime contractors to Government Departments would in future be required to include in their contracts with sub-contractors a clause committing them to pay promptly. The hon. Member for Oxford, East referred to some of the difficulties encountered in introducing and enforcing that provision across the public sector. New arrangements are being introduced by, for example, the Property Services Agency Building Management businesses to ensure that sub-contractors are paid promptly, within 30 days of the validation of the invoice.

A recent survey, to which the hon. Gentleman may have referred indirectly, by the Heating and Ventilating Contractors Association suggested a poor performance by the PSA. It predated the new arrangements and does not reflect their effect. There have been reports in answer to parliamentary questions on the performance of individual Departments, and they show that in 80 to 90 per cent. of cases the majority of Departments are already within the new arrangements, but it is only 12 months since their introduction and we are trying to improve the performance of individual Departments. As the hon. Gentleman himself mentioned, we are giving information on payment performance in departmental reports as well as in comprehensive parliamentary answers.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to an interesting report in this morning's *Financial Times* about a Grant Thornton survey of small and medium enterprises and their prospects in the European Community. I also noticed that report and have asked to see particulars of the survey. We will consider it carefully and see what lessons it has for us and what we should do, if anything, to address the problems that it throws up, on my side at least, as far as VAT is concerned. There may be wider lessons for other parts of Government.

In the early stages of what I had to say I referred to the problems of bad debt for both traders and Customs and Excise in a time of cash flow difficulties for us both, and the necessity of addressing those difficulties, particularly where small firms are concerned. The hon. Member for Oxford, East expressed a strong belief in small businesses and in the bigger part that they will play—bigger even than in recent years—in the recovery from recession to future economic prosperity.

I am glad to have been associated with the small business lobby in the House since before I even became an hon. Member, and I am very glad that small businesses have been able to contribute so much to the economy in the past decade. I am particularly pleased that the Labour party has come round so strongly to the support of small businesses and that it is promoting ideas such as the hon. Gentleman has put forward today to encourage them to build up. Although not earth-shattering, the clause is an important step in that direction, as are the changes in the cash accounting scheme introduced in the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I commend the clause to the Committee, but, for the reasons that I have given, I do not recommend that the Committee goes as far as to insert "three months" into the Bill.

8.45 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): The importance of the amendment that Opposition Members are putting forward is that it allows us to focus on the problems of late payment and bad debt facing many of Britain's 5 million small businesses and to consider the proposed changes to the VAT regime designed to ameliorate the problems that small businesses experience, especially when firms have already paid VAT on moneys owing to them that have become bad debts. No hon. Member will have been left unaware of the problems and demands of small businesses. I certainly have not, since I was elected last year. Many feel as if they are running not only their own businesses but a separate business dealing with the VAT inspectors, the paperwork, the bureaucracy and the appeals that are involved.

Many experience and complain about the often punitive fines which they incur and which equal the earnings in a given week. No doubt VAT men and women are badly misunderstood people, but it must be recognised that many are viewed as tyrants by the small business people who have to deal with the VAT authorities, and it behoves us hon. Members to try to do all that we can to build a bridge between the oppressed and the oppressors. Clause 48 represents the latest attempt to help small businesses by changing the VAT bad debt regulations by making VAT relief on bad debts more readily available. Although it is to be welcomed, it is only part of what is necessary to give greater support to the small business sector. The importance of the small business sector for the British economy has already been stressed. Ninety-five per cent. of all businesses in the United Kingdom employ fewer than 20 people . About half the work force—11 million people—work in small firms. Small firms contribute more than a quarter of the nation's gross domestic product. Small firms have rightly been called the engine room of Britain's economy, and since the war it is small businesses that have provided the fastest growth, the greatest job creation and the most dynamic technological innovation. Their needs are, therefore, a priority for our attention, and recognition of their needs crosses party boundaries and makes absolutely futile the argument that some like to have about whether their party is more

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pro-small firm than the other. I was grateful for the Paymaster General's commendation of the strong support that the modern Labour party gives to small businesses.

In the light, however, of what the Paymaster General said, I was amazed to read, prior to this debate, a debate on 13 November 1992 on small and medium-sized enterprises, initiated by the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), during which his fellow bright spark the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) tried to claim that small business

"drives to the heart of Conservative philosophy"

because

"small businesses are really about individuals, about dreams and aspirations"

and therefore

"solid Conservative principles are at the heart of the matter."

For sheer lack of logic—some would say claptrap—his comments are difficult to beat, especially as he failed to go on and point out how many small firms' dreams have been smashed and aspirations broken on the back of the Tories' recession.

A more accurate summing up of the position regarding small firms was offered by the hon. Member for Colchester, North—obviously a shrewd judge with a brilliant future behind him—when he said:

"it is small firms that feel most under pressure in the recession, most put upon by the banks, most burdened by regulation and most neglected by Government policy."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 1084-143.]

I could not have put it better myself. Our task this evening, across the party divide, is to do what we can to unburden small businesses while observing the standards of employment practice shown in the best small firms. That is the aim of clause 48 and amendment No. 41.

Since that debate last November, the pressure of the recession seems to have eased somewhat—thank goodness for that—although it will take many years to undo the damage caused to small firms by it. There is still a long way to go to unburden small firms fully. It is worth pointing out that, as recovery picks up, some small firms will be experiencing fresh and different financial demans on them, exacerbating the existing problem of bad debt.

The *Financial Times* headlined a story on 4 May, saying:

"Upturn that can spell business ruin."

It explained that the increase in orders that may come about as recovery picks up could mean the final strain on the recession-stretched finances of firms that have high borrowing levels and many late payments outstanding. That point was expanded in a speech made the next day by the director general of the CBI, Howard Davies, who observed:

"small firms' cashflow is so finely balanced that sales growth can put some of them out of business through cash shortages."

A similar comment was made by the chairman of the CBI's small firms council who said:

"over the last year, record numbers of small firms have had difficulties in raising external finance. If these difficulties continue, they will seriously limit their performance and hamper plans for investment and expansion."

It is important to note those concerns, to start preparing for that eventuality and to identify ways to assist small firms in such circumstances.

Bad debts represent a relatively small proportion of firms' finances, but they are an additional and, for many, a critical burden. They are why, in the overall context of small firms' financial needs, it is necessary to make renewed efforts to solve the problem of late payments of debts and why it is important to reduce the waiting period for eligibility for VAT bad debt relief, as both the clause and the amendment would.

VAT payers should have to wait the minimum time possible before they are able to recover VAT payments that they have made on accounts that go bad. That is the aim of the amendment. That action needs to go hand in hand with wider support for small firms at a local level. There is little point in making the changes concerning bad debt and creating the easier conditions for small firms that we are discussing tonight if so much else is not going right, or not right enough, for small firms. I shall give a few examples of what I mean.

Small firms rely on local advice about bad debt and other help to assist their growth. The Government have wisely launched their one-stop shop initiative. Never mind that the scheme introduced by the President of the Board of Trade mirrors almost precisely the ideas that were set out by the Labour party and were originally described by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in an article in *The Independent* on 24 April 1990.

Why has the Government's initiative made so little progress? I am glad that the DTI hopes, as it said this week, that the first of the 23 shops, which will give much needed advice on bad debt as well as on other matters relating to VAT, will be set up by July. However, as the *Financial Times* remarked yesterday:

"On present plans, the government's proposals will take years to implement."

It is hard to believe that we cannot move faster. After all, the original announcement was made in the House on 3 December.

The problem of late payments—a close cousin of bad debt—is still acute. Small companies have little muscle to ensure that they are paid on time and are often particularly vulnerable to a single large debt. Recent surveys have shown that the United Kingdom's bill payment record is noticeably worse than that of the rest of Europe. That was confirmed in the survey to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) referred. Despite trade initiatives such as the CBI prompt payer code, there is a need to have a statutory right to interest on unpaid bills. I urge the Government to re-examine that option. I hope that the Paymaster General, if he speaks again in the debate, will offer the Government's views on that matter.

Underpinning any VAT regime that accommodates the problems of small businesses must be a fair and open appeals procedure in the event of disputes about reclaiming VAT on business expenses. Clause 48 needs to be seen alongside another provision in the Bill. Another clause places on appellants the new burden of having to prove not only that they are right in the eyes of the law but that Customs and Excise acted "unreasonably". That seems unreasonable. Such is the difficulty of proving "unreasonable" in law that the clause has been called "outrageous" by Coopers and Lybrand. I think that it tilts the appeals procedure against the taxpayer, contravening the spirit of the Government's taxpayers charter. It should be reconsidered and I hope that the Paymaster General will tell us, either tonight or when we return to the matter in Committee, whether the Government are prepared to do that.

At the time of the Budget, there was some press criticism of the Chancellor for introducing a mixed package of VAT reforms, some helpful and some that did not go far enough in the view of small business organisations. Our amendment shows how the bad debt change could be taken a step further. I would also urge a close examination of the cash accounting scheme under which businesses with a turnover of below £300,000 are eligible to pay no VAT until they receive payment from their customers. That is extremely relevant to the issue that we are debating. That would be the best indemnity against bad debt, because the businesses taking advantage of the scheme account for VAT on the basis of payment received and made rather than on the tax invoices issued and money received, or not. In that way, the problem of reclaiming VAT on bad debts need not arise in the first place, which is why it is such a useful scheme and one that is so important for many small businesses.

I welcome the raising of the eligibility ceiling to £350,000; none the less, conditions for entry to the scheme remain restrictive. Quite often, that is because of the bad debt trouble that small firms already experience. I hope that the Government will examine further the administration of the scheme and look closely at ways to draw more businesses to it, including raising the ceiling further. At present, Customs and Excise estimate that only 40 per cent. of eligible traders are in the scheme.

The lesson of the past decade is that, even in the most enterprising business sector, Government support and action are vital for success. The Government concentrated their attention on that matter and their help to small businesses during the 1980s—I do not gainsay the assistance that they offered during that time—concentrated largely on start-up advice. That now needs to embrace greater help not simply to nurture the start-up of small firms but to promote their growth.

Without doubt, the greatest blow to small businesses has been the recession, which has been a disaster, a hurricane which has wiped out vast stretches of the small business sector and the enterprise culture. In Hartlepool, more than 130 small businesses have gone under in the past three years, 30 of them in vital industrial sectors. In the past 12 months, 55 companies have closed, although my recent meetings with the town's business people give some cause for cautious optimism that things are starting to improve. I certainly hope that they will.

If business confidence and order books are growing, as I hope that they are, and if they are to be sustained, now is the time to do everything possible to assist the growth of small businesses. The high street banks have a considerable responsibility in that.

9 pm

Greater long-term attention must be paid to the way in which small businesses are financed. That is an old and much debated issue which is familiar to Opposition Members who are concerned about small businesses; none the less, it has been insufficiently acted on by the banks and has been given insufficient encouragement by the Government.

The banks are often cast as villains, but recently I met representatives of NatWest and my impression was that some banks at least are more open to ideas on different ways of working, including increased debt-for-equity swaps, than they have been in the past. Those and other options desperately need to be driven forward if we are to nurture and sustain the small business sector that we so desperately need for the success of our economy in future. I hope that the proposals and ideas will be put forward on the back of the Finance Bill and its proposals on bad debt relief and other changes.

I hope that the Government will see fit—if not tonight, then on future occasions—to give rather more positive consideration to the amendment.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has the pleasure of supporting the clause because, like many people, I know only too well of all the care, consideration and help that he has given small businesses throughout his parliamentary career. My right hon. Friend is on much safer ground than he was last night, when he was faced with a volatile and noisy Committee, and he has great experience in these matters.

I remind the Committee that we are discussing clause 48 which reduces the waiting period for eligibility for VAT bad debt relief from one year to six months. That is achieved in two ways. Clause 48(1) amends section 11(1)(c) of the Finance Act 1990 by reducing the elapsed time required for eligibility from one year to six months. What is also important, and has not yet been mentioned, is the alteration under subsection (2) which allows the reduced waiting period to have effect from 1 April 1993 in relation to supplies made on or after 1 April 1992.

I have often heard it said that large companies dine out on the overdrafts of small companies and I am sure that that is right. When companies have cash flow problems they make every possible excuse for not meeting their payments. Those excuses range from the mildest, such as that the cheque is in the post, to much stronger excuses. But cheques arrive unsigned and have to be sent back, thereby giving the company another week, or the totals are not written in, so the cheques go back.

People may phone up the accounts department of another company that owes them money, only to be told, "We cannot pay your £6,000 invoice until we get paid." I should like to think that many companies then ask, "How much can you afford to pay?". If the reply is, "We can only pay £3,000 until we get paid", smaller firms in particular should reply, "Well, pay us the £3,000." If everyone did that, money would begin to circulate and cash flow problems would be eased throughout the business sector, wages would be paid and banks would take the pressure off companies. It is one thing to suffer debt; it is another to lock up bad debt for a whole year. That is a long time for a company to wait, especially one experiencing cash flow problems.

Earlier, Opposition Members levelled accusations at the Government, blaming them for the fact that companies were struggling. The world recession is common knowledge, but we should remember that companies are robbed of jobs by such developments as mechanisation and automation. For instance, there was a time when every bus had a conductor; now the driver takes the money, and thousands of jobs have been lost. Similarly, railway booking offices used to contain any number of ticket sellers; now there may be one such employee, and travellers must buy their tickets from machines. There used to be a man at the barrier in the underground station; now passengers feed their tickets into the machine. Even

[Mr. Geoffrey Dickens]

when passengers want to leave the station that is their destination, a machine must swallow their tickets before they can do so.

Years ago, people did all those jobs, but we must not struggle against change. The small businesses of today are the big businesses of tomorrow. When the railways were built, the farriers, those who made tack for the horses, the wheelwrights and people who made carriages threw up their hands in horror, saying, "We will be out of business." Many of them were, but at every railway station W. H. Smith put up a newspaper stand.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I always hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he is straying very wide of the subject of debt. I hope that he will relate his remarks to the amendment.

Mr. Dickens: May I finish my little story? It is relevant.

Suddenly, small companies began to mushroom following the setting up of those bookstalls—companies producing newspapers, magazines and books, which are now sold by the thousand at railway stations. They created many more jobs than had been lost to those connected with horses and carriages. That is an example of the way in which mighty companies can grow from little acorns.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) made a good point. He said that there might be difficult days ahead for small businesses with debts. That is true. Unfortunately, until recently, the banks were pulling the plug rather quickly on small companies with cash flow problems, because their overdrafts were secured on assets such as buildings and land. As the property market began to slip and such assets became less valuable—especially in the south—they ceased to match those small companies' overdrafts. The banks began to fidget and to look for more security in other areas, driving the small companies into the ground.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, a greater danger lies ahead—a danger closely connected with debt. Small companies will want to buy more materials as the recession draws to a close and the market grows—we hope that we are now emerging completely from recession—in order to add value, to produce goods to sell and to increase their profits. Will the banks allow those companies to extend their overdrafts, which are running at the upper limits, so that they can buy the material that they need?

In the early days, the banks were pulling the plug because they felt that they could sell buildings and land more easily than small companies that were struggling. In the event, they found that they could not. What will happen when the assets grow in value to match the overdraft facility? Will the banks run for cover and pull the plug? In Germany, banks take equity in companies and run with them. Here, the banking mentality is different.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. That is all very interesting, but what has it to do with debt in small companies? The hon. Gentleman should confine his remarks to the amendment.

Mr. Dickens: I am obliged to you, Mr. Lofthouse. I thought that I was dealing with debt and the problems of small businesses. Before you resumed the Chair, we had a much wider debate, and I was endeavouring to answer points which were raised. I will accede to your request, since I have the greatest respect for you and the Chair.

Small businesses have already welcomed the proposal on bad debt in the Budget. The period of three months suggested by the Opposition is much too short. It cannot be said that a debt becomes a bad debt in such a short time. Companies like a sporting chance. When two companies have been dealing with each other for many years, one understands that the other is trying to keep its promise to pay and it would not want to regard a debt as a bad debt after only three months.

In some contracts, 90 days is the normal period for settling an account. It is going too far to suggest that an outstanding bill becomes a bad debt after three months. A period of six months is ideal.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Can my hon. Friend explain why accountants often recommend that their clients should include in contracts a clause giving 10 per cent. off if a bill is paid in a certain period, but the accountants themselves and other professional people never knock 10 per cent. off their bills? Would that not be a good idea?

Mr. Dickens: Hon. Members will correct me if I am wrong, but I always thought that accountants made assumptions. People are going down a slippery slope when they start to give discounts. If a small business gave 10 per cent. discount, it would begin to work at distress rates and it would get into real difficulty.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): I must come to the defence of accountants. I express an interest because my husband is an accountant. He gives the most generous discounts.

Mr. Dickens: I will not be tempted into an argument by saying that sometimes people must overcharge to be able to give large discounts. I am too generous of disposition to go down that road in a debate which must concentrate on clause 48.

I have made a sensible contribution. I always gain favour by leaving time for other hon. Members to make their contributions. I hope that theirs will be as sensible as mine.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I hope that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) will get a gold star in the Whips' book to follow the black mark that he got yesterday. His turn round could scarcely be equalled for speed, if not necessarily for the quality of his contribution—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] —although it was entertaining.

Mr. Mandelson: Withdraw.

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that it is necessary to withdraw. Opposition Members are supportive of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth, but I do not want to go too wide of the amendment and be called to order by the Chair.

The debate is important to small businesses, a subject in which I am particularly interested. There are many small businesses and self-employed people in my constituency. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats currently represent many areas, such as Cornwall and Bath, containing a high proportion of small businesses. My hon. Friends and I

have over the years raised the concerns of small businesses and have argued the case on their behalf in respect of bad debt and VAT payments.

9.15 pm

Clause 48 is a welcome pro-small business move and is designed to help cash flow. Businesses will have to wait less time to get back from Customs and Excise the VAT paid in respect of goods and services already sold but not paid for. As I have said, it is a welcome move which will be supported in all parts of the Committee. It will be particularly welcome to small businesses which have witnessed the stern and unbending hand of the penalties for late payment of VAT. They will be pleased to see matters turning more in their favour.

I have recently been dealing with the case of a small business in my constituency. The firm posted a VAT return in time but it was not received by the VAT office because of a dispute there. That meant that the post had not been processed. Even so, the firm is being asked to pay a fine and has been told, in effect, "Had you posted it earlier, it would have arrived before the industrial dispute." That seems harsh, and I shall be contacting the Minister once the small business in question has had time to digest that reply and got over the shock.

The measure now proposed by the Government is more generous. There is a connection between the VAT relief for bad debt and the VAT cash accounting scheme. Whereas the VAT relief applies to most companies, for the smallest companies which elect for VAT cash accounting there is no waiting period because they pay the VAT only when they get paid.

If the VAT cash accounting scheme applied to more businesses, VAT relief would be needed only for larger companies, which are generally more able to cope with cash flow problems. The Government brought the scheme into existence in 1987 and have increased the threshold in this Budget. That is welcome. The threshold for eligibility to the scheme will now be £350,000.

Liberal Democrats argue in our alternative budget that the threshold would be more appropriately increased to £1 million, so achieving a clear difference between companies which find it difficult to meet cash flow problems arising from bad debt and larger companies which are more able to absorb relatively small-scale problems as they proceed through their normal course of business.

Has the Minister explored the possibility of increasing further the threshold on the VAT cash accounting scheme, thus giving more help to more small companies? That would give more help than the Labour amendment would achieve. The only cost to the Exchequer would be a cash flow cost. Although it might under EC rules require a derogation, the Minister should explore that area because it would make a real difference to a large number of companies which, by any normal definition, remain small, albeit they are outside the limits of the scheme.

While the clause deals with one Government-related problem of bad debt, there is a much larger private sector problem concerned with the late payment of debt. Indeed, the day-to-day problem that most businesses in Cornwall have mentioned to me is late payment of commercial debt. When a firm's business customers do not pay their bills on time, the cash flow problems can have so many other effects in terms of higher costs and pressure from the bank that the firm can end up closing down, with knock-on effects for its suppliers.

I recall leaning against a gate by the travelling surgery that I conduct in villages around my constituency talking to a builder who had been put out of business precisely because of the problem that I have described. He simply could not understand the attitude that had been taken not just by the Government but by various bodies with which he had had to deal. He felt that there was so little understanding of the problem that he had been put out of business through no fault of his own. He had indeed done the job well; it was merely the payment that had not come through.

Some might ask what the late payment of commercial debt has to do with the Government. Is it not, they ask, up to the firms involved to sort themselves out? The evidence goes against this purist, non-interventionist view, however. Despite years of exhortation to firms to pay their bills promptly, on the part of the Government and of business organisations such as the CBI, a recent survey by the Association of British Factors and Discounters showed that the average repayment period was now 80 days. A similar survey conducted last December by Trade Indemnity, the credit insurer, found that only 3 per cent. of nearly 600 firms contacted were being paid on time. In 1991, the Forum for Private Business estimated that small companies were owed more than £100 million in overdue debt.

The recovery may reduce the scale of the problem, and the latest quarterley review of the Association of British Factors and Discounters suggests that that is happening. If so, it is certainly welcome, but the problem will not go away. A report by the National Westminster bank in yesterday's *Financial Times* found the picture as bad as ever; and today's *Financial Times* quotes a study by the Manchester business school showing that, because of the recession in some European countries, some United Kingdom firms are finding it difficult to get continental customers to pay their bills on time, suggesting moreover that there may need to be action at European level to prevent unfair practices from taking hold in the single market. I hope that the Minister will make representations about the problem in Europe. This is a good example of a problem that will need to be tackled in future at that level.

However one considers the payment of commercial debt, there is clearly a problem. Although we welcome the provisions of clause 48, it shows that the Government are missing the larger picture in relation to late and bad debts.

There are some simple measures which firms can take themselves and which the Government can help to facilitate. First, many firms need to manage credit lines better. Often, companies can do more themselves, and the Government could encourage training and enterprise councils, and local enterprise companies in Scotland, to run courses in credit management for business people and their employees. If the one-stop shops develop as I hope that they will—we have long called for their development—I trust that they will take a lead in this area.

The Government could also make good their long-standing pledge to simplify the cumbersome and costly commercial debt recovery procedures so as to make legal redress for companies a realistic option. If they do so, the costs of this measure may fall as a result. A little money spent now may save the Government money in the longer term.

Even with such developments, however, I believe that late payment will remain a serious problem for small and medium-sized companies. The commercial fact of life is

that larger firms can and do use their market power to scare their smaller suppliers into putting up with late payment. That abuse of market power suggests a role for competition policy and hence for some sort of Government intervention.

The Chancellor half acknowledged this problem when he announced in the pre-election Budget that new legislation would require larger companies to state in the notes to their accounts the average time taken to pay their bills. But the lack of understanding in the DTI of the seriousness of the problem was shown by the fact that it took almost a year for the Government to follow up that announcement with a consultation paper. In any case, shaming companies into paying their debts on time in this way is likely to prove ineffective. It might even prove counter-productive; those thinking of investing might inquire why payment was being made so quickly instead of pressing companies to pay more speedily.

So why not legislate for a statutory right to interest on debts outstanding after a certain period? The idea has received support in all parts of the House in the past, and it has been implemented in every European country bar the United Kingdom and Ireland. It is one measure that gets over the free-rider problem, ensuring that every firm has an incentive to comply. This measure would change the current awful culture of waiting until the very last minute before making payment. If the measure were in place, business men could devote their time to being business men instead of debt collectors.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Surely the hon. Gentleman knows that the reason for that idea not having been carried through and being treated with considerable reserve by many business organisations is that it is likely that if there were a compulsory right to interest, it would be enforced by the big companies against the small ones while the small companies would not dare to alienate their customers by acting similarly.

Mr. Taylor: That argument has been put forward before. My experience is that it is the big companies which resist the principle while the small ones argue for it. What I am suggesting for the United Kingdom is done in other European countries. I am sure that the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) will acknowledge that this debate takes place across parties as well as between them. However, I believe that he is wrong and that a great many small businesses agree with me.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman is probably aware that the Federation of Small Businesses—the biggest organisation for small businesses in this country, I believe—has declined to adopt the policy that he is putting forward. That body has identified the problem as being that, whether or not interest is charged, small companies ultimately have to go through the civil procedures of the British courts. That is what gives rise to most of the problems that small companies experience. They have to secure a judgment, but more often than not they also have to go back to have the judgment enforced. In the meantime, very often the bird has flown. That problem, too, must be addressed.

Mr. Taylor: I strongly agree with the hon. Lady. Indeed, I referred a few moments ago to the need to sort out a system of securing payment. I am sure that the hon. Lady, like me, receives many letters from small businesses that have obtained an order to secure payment but find that they have to go back to court. In many cases they are advised that it would simply be too costly to pursue the matter. Perhaps the Government could alter the title of the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill and introduce into it a provision to tackle this problem. Why wait?

The problems caused by bad debt are to only a very small degree solved by this clause. None the less, I welcome the fact that the Government are moving in the direction of change. Although there are some signs that we are coming out of recession, small businesses still have to face extremely harsh problems. Indeed, many people are still likely to lose their businesses. We have heard expressions of worry that it may take some years to recover properly from the recession. I am afraid that many people who have lost their businesses will never recover. We must consider all possible means of tackling this problem.

For many businesses in the south-west, the problems created by rising electricity, gas and water prices represent a more urgent and fundamental priority. None the less, this is an important measure, which is welcomed by my party.

Mrs. Browning: Payment on time and bad debt have been identified by hon. Members on both sides of the Committee as very important and serious, especially in relation to the cash flow of small businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) began by outlining the way in which many companies, particularly large companies, try to avoid payment when it becomes due, and he identified three or four of the most common excuses for non-payment.

I must declare an interest. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was a management consultant, and one of the areas in which I specialised was advice for companies in the United Kingdom and abroad on collection and credit control. It may be of assistance to my hon. Friend the Minister—as I am in a generous mood, perhaps I should say that it may be of interest to hon. Members on both sides of the Committee—if I say that I have a list of the 20 most common excuses used for non-payment, and I can tell hon. Members the response that one should make immediately to ensure that one is not floored by one of these excuses.

This is a serious matter. There are many reasons for the failure of companies to get their money on time. We have heard about the difficulties involved in dealing with large corporations. In many sectors, one sees the big stick being waved. This applies not least in the retail food chain, where small businesses supply the large supermarkets.

Such chains will often arbitrarily change the terms of a contract in mid-contract. An egg producer in my constituency was told by a large supermarket that the payment term that had previously been 30 days was to be changed to 60 without any question of renegotiation.

9.30 pm

We understand the difficulties and, ultimately, the cash flow problems that that means for small businesses, and I welcome the measure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has introduced on the treatment of debt and VAT. My right hon. Friend has already mentioned that it will mean an estimated £150 million benefit to the cash flow of businesses.

As the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and others have mentioned, the cash accounting scheme

means that small businesses—previously those with a turnover of £300,000, now £350,000—will not have the problem, because they will be dealing on a cash accounting basis, and that is most welcome. I am aware, as I am sure is my right hon. Friend, that many small business organisations, in their representations to the Treasury before the Budget, particularly asked for this measure to be introduced.

I also know from consultations with Treasury Ministers before the Budget that, realising that it would be a difficult Budget with not a lot to give away, Conservative Members urged my right hon. Friend that anything that he could give should be given to the small business sector. This will be extremely welcome.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) mentioned debts and the ability to add interest to them. That can be negotiated, as long as it is done at the point of contract and not added retrospectively. I am sure that all hon. Members are aware that other members of the EC operate the scheme.

The hon. Member mentioned the difficulties that those countries are having. Again, I am prepared to share an experience with the Committee. In Italy, a letter to the local chamber of commerce resulted in the payment of a debt by return. Again, that suggests that other European countries are now suffering from the recession, and the payment of debts may become a more common problem.

In my own business experience of dealing with public limited companies and large corporations, right down to small businesses and sole proprietors, they are still reluctant, when they agree to do business with other businesses, to carry out the necessary credit controls and checks to ensure the creditworthiness of those with whom they are about to do business.

There are many examples of what can only be described as sloppy procedure on the part of companies. Sometimes it is not deliberate. The smaller the company, the busier are the people who run it. The sole proprietor of a small business has to sell and buy goods and deal with the documentation, and I can understand it if chasing up debts is put on the back burner. However, the longer a debt is left, the more likely it is that ultimately it will be written off, and that includes the VAT element as well. Many companies have been forced to do that: it is not a case of good business practice. That is a salutary lesson for any company to learn.

One has to be vigilant and efficient in getting money in on time. As someone who has, or had, a reputation to keep in this area—I occasionally write on the subject in periodicals—my terms were 30 days; on day 31, the person who owed me money received a telephone call from me before 10 am. I thoroughly commend that procedure to businesses, particularly small ones.

The measure reducing from one year to six months the waiting period for bad debt relief will be welcome. Hon. Members have identified areas associated with bad debt and business write-offs which are a burden on businesses. One of the difficulties that businesses have to face concerns the banks. The reduction of interest rates will help with the cash flow of businesses.

We are pleased that interest rates are coming down. However, one must sometimes question the banks' judgment when lending to small businesses, because they should realise that businesses may sink.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool gave examples of the difficulties that businesses face when they are expanding. Businesses get into debt because they do not have orders; they also get into debt because they are doing well. The hon. Gentleman outlined what we all recognise as over-trading. We shall have to address that problem as the economy picks up, and as businesses receive more orders and begin to grow again.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): The clause is obviously very welcome; the problem is that it does not go far enough. It has taken the Government five years to reduce the deadline for bad debt recovery from two years to six months. They should have gone rather further rather more quickly.

The amendment is designed to assist small businesses in particular. I was especially taken with the contribution by the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), who spoke a lot of sense—I hasten to add the caveat, "on this one occasion"; I cannot say that I always agree with everything he says. The problems of small businesses that he outlined, such as access to finance and difficulties with bad debts, were pertinent. Before I came to the House, I worked in north Tyneside with small companies, both fledgling and expanding, and I know that the hon. Gentleman identified the problems accurately.

The problems that most often arose for small businesses were simple. They were lack of access to finance for expansion, especially in the range £250,000 to £1 million, in which venture capital is not available. That problem is especially acute in the peripheral regions, including my own, because venture capital is overwhelmingly concentrated in the south-east. Companies also encountered problems with late payment and bad debts. Those were the problems that the companies most often identified.

For small companies, especially companies that seek to grow rapidly, bad debts and late payments can quickly become a death sentence. My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has already pointed out the ways in which the problems can become more acute at the beginning of a recovery. Small businesses cannot rely on retained surpluses or on profits. They probably have to rely on borrowing for investment, and on cash flow to support risk business.

We have heard about the positive steps that have been taken in expanding the limit to £350,000, which is welcome. However, I hope that the Paymaster General will take the opportunity to address the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) about the fact that many firms that qualify under the cash accounting scheme do not take advantage of its provisions. Approximately 200,000 small companies fall into that category. Hundreds of thousands of other small firms fall outside the £350,000 exemption which face similar difficulties.

There are 3 million small firms in this country, and there are 3 million self-employed people. They play a vital and expanding role in the nation's economy. Between 1987 and 1989, for example, firms with fewer than 10 employees were responsible for nearly half the jobs created. Small firms are often the most innovative and entrepreneurial, and they are often the most prone to take the biggest risks. They therefore need the most assistance. They have been badly treated in the recent years of recession. Between 1989 and 1992, there were almost 187,000 new VAT registrations, which was extremely good news. However, 240,000 VAT-registered businesses were deregulated, amounting to a net loss of about 53,000 companies.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

As my hon. Friends have made clear, smaller companies are especially prone to bad debt problems. The finances of small companies suffer disproportionately from late payment.

The reasoning behind the amendment is simple: if the Government's claims about economic recovery and about the key role that small businesses will play in it are true, it is important that Ministers act to ensure that real stimuli are given to help that recovery. As the *Financial Times* article of a day or so ago suggested, there is a late payment culture in Britain. The problems that small businesses face as a result of late payments and bad debts are much more acute than those faced by their cousins on the continent. It is incumbent on the Government to play a positive role in intervening to overcome those problems

I am reminded of the famous and oft-quoted remarks of the President of the Board of Trade about intervening before each and every meal. The amendment gives the Government a real opportunity to do just that. I hope that the Minister will take it seriously. I hope that he will show his empathy with small businesses and his sympathy for those who have given their lives to create job opportunities and wealth by helping them to overcome some of the problems that beset them, through no fault of their own.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I apologise to the Committee for the fact that I was not here for the start of the debate. A constituent came to see me about difficulties in connection with the statementing of a child. Faced with such difficult situations, I put my constituents first, but I again apologise for not being here earlier.

As someone who has taken a great interest in small business for 16 or 17 years now, I can, I think with modesty, suggest that this is ground that has been galloped upon quite a few times. Although I do not recognise the amendment as a sensible proposal and will not support it if there is a Division, I welcome the opportunity it gives us to draw to the attention of the Committee and the nation the problems of small business debt.

Small businesses are the acorns from which oaks can grow. They are the employment generators of the future. In future, employment will come not from big businesses, which, as a result of robotics and information technology, will shed rather than generate jobs, but from smaller business with more labour-intensive requirements. It is small businesses that we should be encouraging at this stage.

I want to disabuse the Committee of the popular view that running a small business is easy. In fact, it is harder than running a big business. Someone running a small business must be able to understand VAT, health and safety legislation, the pay-as-you-earn system, national insurance and employment law. One has five minutes left at the end of the day in which to run the business itself and perhaps make a few shillings to pay VAT, the uniform business rate, national insurance and so on.

In small business, debt control is not easy and it is not good. During the past six months or so, I have been going around the regional centres of our banks. I have been unhappy with the banks' support for business over the past year or so. To my amazement, although I would not say that they have been fighting back—they are too delicate and too gentle for that—more than one bank has told me that, of its commercial clients who have turnovers of up to £1·2 million a year—I do not know why that is the figure used—only 10 per cent. produce a profit and loss account for every month's trading.

That is staggering. How anyone can go into small business and try to run a business without a monthly profit and loss account, I simply do not know; I find it incredible. If that is the case, every figure goes out the window when one starts talking about cash flow. It is small wonder that small businesses run into trouble on debt control, not because of malevolence or trying to fiddle things, but because they simply do not have the proper managerial tools.

I welcome the change from one year to six months. I welcome the Labour party's amendment as a method of opportunity to debate the matter. If Labour Members know anything at all about small business, they will not press the amendment to a vote tonight. If they do, that will show that they are completely ignorant of small business and are simply using it as a tool to debate a specific issue and make a specific point. The small business sector will be back safely in Conservative hands, because Labour Members do not understand it one iota.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who has obviously popped out to have some dinner or something, said that bad debt is a small proportion of the small business sector and its debts. That exposes an innocence of the small business world, because there is a real difficulty in distinguishing between the slow payer and the long payer in small business. My hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) made a point about all the excuses that can be used to delay debt.

At the end of the day, one never knows whether a person will pay. One gets into the catch 22 position—does one want to lose customers or hope to get the money and then retain them and do more business?

Mr. Dickens: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Page: With respect to my hon. Friend, who made a powerful speech earlier, I am getting messages from afar that mean that I have literally one minute to go.

The pressure on small businesses to do business in recessison is almost irresistible. The measure introduced by the Government is exceptionally helpful, especially the provision that it will come into force on 1 April 1993 and apply to supplies that come in on or after 1 April 1992. That will give a valuable cash flow boost to those companies that accumulated debts during that period and help to go forward into the recovery that is now taking place.

I sincerely hope that Labour Members will not press their amendment tonight, but congratulate the Government on reducing the provision from one year to six months.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Labour Members are not fundamentally disagreeing with the Government's proposal on bad debts or, indeed, the other proposals in the Budget to assist small businesses. In our amendment, we are saying that the Government have not gone far enough. We do not believe that their proposals are unacceptable; they are unexceptional. They have missed so many opportunities to assist small firms, especially at a time when they have great problems with debt.

We are not simply dealing with small firms that tick on daily and yearly. We should be looking at the growing firms that can add to and create the industrial base for the future at a time when, even by the Government's forecast, investment in manufacturing in the United Kingdom at the end of this year will still be 10 per cent. lower than it was in 1989. We can see the scale of the problem that we want to address.

Clearly, there is a debt crisis in the United Kingdom. It is almost as though small firms are playing a bizarre game of pass the parcel. The problem is that, when the music stops and the firm ends up with the parcel, it ends up with a debt problem that cannot be resolved because of cash flow difficulties. The small firm then goes out of business. It passes on the parcel—it owes money to other firms, but cannot pay because it has gone out of business, so the next firm with the parcel is also overwhelmed by debt and goes out of business.

Time and again in my constituency I have seen how the failure of one firm spirals down to the failure of other firms. The game is a handicap. As Conservative Members said, small firms are handicapped as large firms take advantage of them and squeeze them harder on the supply of goods and payment times, to the advantage of larger organisations.

All too often in this debt crisis, we see not merely industrial failure. So often the borrowing of small firms is backed, because the banks put on pressure, by the only asset that owners have—their house. So often as constituency Members we see not merely the failure of small firms, but, as a result of the problems of negative equity, repossession of the property of the owner. That is a problem in this recession. But let us think what will happen in the next recession. Let us see what will happen in the recovery which we hope is starting. Who will go to the bank to borrow money when the requirement is to put up his house as the asset backing? Who will do that knowing that thousands of people have lost not merely their business but their home in this recession?

Where are the Government's proposals? I should like the Paymaster General to consider promoting an initiative to introduce equity lending and venture capital on a real scale into the funding of small enterprises in Britain. I have seen nothing in the Budget and heard nothing from the Government on that. Have they not listened to Howard Davies, who has said that just as the banks over-lent during the 1980s, there is a real danger that they will over-react and over-restrict their lending in the 1990s? If the banks do that, where else is the capital for small firms to come from?

Why have not the Government expanded the loan guarantee scheme on a massive scale or launched a Government initiative to release the resources of pension schemes for direct investment? Why do not the Government respond to the Confederation of British Industry, which has made proposals recently to address the issue of debt? The Government could create an independent debt tribunal to address the problems of debt recovery for small firms, to which the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) referred.

On the issue of swifter payments, why have not the Government considered the German scheme and introduced a national initiative to reduce payment times to protect small firms from pressure from larger firms? Why have not the Government introduced initiatives to swap debt for equity? Why have they not produced a replacement for the business expansion scheme operating through local investment vehicles, which the CBI has promoted? We do not want the sort of scheme that resulted in fake housing enterprises which were simply a vehicle for tax avoidance for so many people. But why have not the Government introduced a scheme to channel money into small enterprises?

Why do not the Government address the problem that 64 per cent. of venture capital goes into management buy-outs rather than start-ups or early stage funding? The Paymaster General said that so much had been achieved by small firms in Britain. So much more could be achieved if only the Government and the financial institutions got together and assisted the development of our future industrial base.

Mr. Batiste: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, albeit briefly, in the debate on a subject on which I made my maiden speech some 10 years ago. The matter has by no means diminished in importance in those years. The common feature of virtually all the speeches by both Conservative and Opposition Members was the importance of small businesses to the economy. There has been a surprising increase in the number of jobs in the past couple of months. That reduction in unemployment was unexpected at this stage of an economic recovery. I suggest that it was largely created by small businesses, which are operating close to the optimum level of efficiency. They can therefore respond to growth quickly.

As small businesses respond to growth, they will be in danger of overtrading and their cash flow will come under severe pressure. That is why the Government's measure is welcome. It injects an extra £150 million into the cash flow of small businesses at a time when they need it. The backdating to 1 April will also be welcome because it will give companies the opportunity to plan from now with considerable security.

I am aware of the time and I know that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General wants to reply to the debate. I make one plea with all the force at my command. While the measures to improve cash flow are important, the one thing above all that the Treasury can do to help small businesses in the next year is to show a measure of forebearance to companies that are a little late in paying their VAT, national insurance or income tax. That lateness often does not happen because companies have mispriced their products or are running their businesses badly, but because they are having to wait for money from their customers. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to say that the Treasury understands that problem and will be reasonably sympathetic to companies that say that they need a little understanding to see them through until they are paid.

I commend the clause and I ask the Opposition not to press the amendment to a Division, because there is a difference between late payment and bad debt. Bad debt occurs much later than after three months. If we adopted the three-month waiting period, the VAT clawback would inevitably impose a regulatory burden. We need deregulation, not more regulation, and imposing a three-month limit instead of a six-month one would be bound to produce a regulatory nightmare. I look forward to hearing what my right hon. Friend says.

Sir John Cope: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to the debate, which has been an interesting one and has ranged a good deal wider than the clause under consideration. It was none the worse for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) echoed an important point that I used to emphasise when I was the Minister responsible for small firms—that running a small business is more difficult than running a large one simply because of the range of expertise that one must have and the number of different matters with which one must keep up. That is why it behoves those of us in government, with responsibility for the different bits of bureaucracy that impinge on small businesses, to ensure that we do our best to make sure that that bureaucracy is as user-friendly as possible. That applies as much to VAT as to any part of Government bureaucracy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) called for forebearance. Although Customs and Excise has been pursuing its proper duties in claiming revenue, my hon. Friend may be interested to know that the number of time-to-pay agreements has increased by 52 per cent. in the latest financial year for which figures are available, 1991-92. The value of those agreements has increased by 70 per cent. That demonstrates how debt management, the phrase now used by Customs and Excise, has responded to the needs of small business in the manner requested by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) made an interesting and even more wide-ranging speech than other hon. Members and referred to the commencement date. The new provision applies to a debt resulting from goods supplied in the previous year. If a firm has not been paid for something supplied on 30 June last year, under the old system it would not have been able to write off that payment for VAT purposes as a bad debt because 12 months had not elapsed. It will now be able to do so and could have done as soon as the new scheme started on 1 April.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) gave us the advantage of her expertise and gave us some shrewd advice for which, before she became a Member, we would have had to pay and, as she made clear, paid promptly. Even if we had got a discount from her husband, it was not clear that we would have done from my hon. Friend, for reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth made clearer than most.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) raised a number of points about the cash accounting scheme. The consultation document states that the aim is

"to make Cash Accounting as attractive and simple to use as possible."

In other words, it will be user-friendly, as I said earlier.

On that subject, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said that the conditions of entry to the cash accounting scheme should not be too restrictive. He seems to have gone back to Hartlepool or somewhere; at any rate, he is not here now. I tried to make it clear in my opening remarks that we had made it a lot easier to enter the cash accounting scheme. One need no longer fill in a form and seek permission in advance. Only two restrictions remain: the person concerned must not have committed a VAT offence in the past three years and must not have a debt to the Customs of more than £5,000 at the time. Those are very small restrictions on entry to the scheme.

10 pm

As a past member of the Deputy Chief Whips' society or union, I must not run over my time tonight. I just want to emphasise, in concluding, that this is not the only thing that we are doing for small business in the Finance Bill. There is a range of help for small businesses and quite properly so, as the debate has emphasised, as regards rates, VAT penalties, capital gains tax relief for entrepreneurs, improvements to the loan guarantee scheme as called for by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), reduced premiums for the loan guarantee scheme, expansion of the business start-up scheme and various deregulation measures.

All these are extremely desirable and I thoroughly recommend them and clause 48 to the Committee, but I do not recommend that the Committee votes for amendment No. 41.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 252, Noes 292.

Division No. 264] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cousins, Jim
Adams, Mrs Irene	Cryer, Bob
Ainger, Nick	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Allen, Graham	Dafis, Cynog
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Darling, Alistair
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Davidson, Ian
Armstrong, Hilary	Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Austin-Walker, John	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Barnes, Harry	Denham, John
Barron, Kevin	Dewar, Donald
Battle, John	Dixon, Don
Bayley, Hugh	Dobson, Frank
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Donohoe, Brian H.
Bell, Stuart	Dowd, Jim
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Bennett, Andrew F.	Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Benton, Joe	Eagle, Ms Angela
Berry, Dr. Roger	Eastham, Ken
Betts, Clive	Enright, Derek
Blunkett, David	Etherington, Bill
Boateng, Paul	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Boyce, Jimmy	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Boyes, Roland	Fatchett, Derek
Bradley, Keith	Faulds, Andrew
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Fisher, Mark
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Flynn, Paul
Burden, Richard	Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Byers, Stephen	Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Callaghan, Jim	Foulkes, George
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*	Fraser, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Fyfe, Maria
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*	Galbraith, Sam
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Gapes, Mike
Cann, Jamie	Garrett, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*	George, Bruce
Chisholm, Malcolm	Gerrard, Neil
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Godsiff, Roger
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Golding, Mrs Llin
Clelland, David	Gould, Bryan
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Graham, Thomas
Cohen, Harry	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Connarty, Michael	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Grocott, Bruce
Corston, Ms Jean	Gunnell, John

Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*

Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 48 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Committee report progress.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

To sit again tomorrow.

Fishing (Time at Sea)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): We now come to the motion on sea fish licensing.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. According to the Order Paper,

"The Instrument has not yet been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments."

The Standing Orders place a duty on that Committee to report to the House. I must register a strong protest that the instrument is being rushed through and that the Committee's report is not available. The Committee is asking the Ministry a number of questions; according to the terms of our operation, we must allow it to reply to those questions, and we cannot do that until next week. I wrote to the Leader of the House asking him to defer the debate in view of the circumstances, but that has not been done.

I should add that the Ministry presented the order in time for it to be submitted to the Joint Committee, but for some reason deliberately delayed its submission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he has put his point. He will know, however, that the Chair is not responsible for what the House debates.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a new point of order.

Mr. Wallace: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you will know only too well, as the statutory instrument is subject to the negative procedure, you will be obliged to put the Question at 11.30 pm. I am sure, however, that you are also aware that under Standing Order No. 15(2) you can

"interrupt the business and the debate shall stand adjourned till the next sitting"

owing either to the "lateness of the hour" or the

"importance of the subject matter".

The Division on an amendment to the Finance Bill has already eaten into the time allowed for this debate. Moreover, this is a complex provision that will affect the livelihood of fishermen around our coast——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman seems to be taking precedence over others who wish to speak. We have well over an hour for the debate.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to the point of order raised by my hon Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask you——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ruled very fairly on the point raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Bennett: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You do not have the power to decide what is debated, but you have the power to deprecate the procedure of a Department that does not give the House adequate time to debate the issues involved in Committee. It would be helpful if the Chair were to indicate that it disapproves strongly of a Department trying to short-circuit the work of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I ruled that the Chair had no responsibility for what the House debates.

10.19 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Sea Fish Licensing (Time at Sea) (Principles) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1196), dated 30th April 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 4th May, be annulled.

My hon. Friends have a legitimate point. The way the order has been rushed before the House is unsatisfactory.

I should make it clear at the outset that the House has before it probably the most controversial fishing measure ever to be debated here. Certainly no policy has ever provoked such united opposition from our fishing communities. Everyone who reads the fishing press and, indeed, newspapers generally must be aware that relations between the Government and the fishing industry are at an all-time low. The Government's tie-up policy is the most important factor provoking such strenuous opposition from our fishermen. As an Opposition, we support the complete resistance of the fishermen to the compulsory tie-up policy.

If a conservation measure is to be effective, it has to be implemented with the co-operation of the industry. There is no way this policy will achieve the co-operation of the industry or will prove to be an effective fish conservation measure. That is the first reason why the Government should abandon their policy.

Hon. Members who have taken the trouble to read the order will be forced to conclude that we are being asked to implement a bureaucratic nightmare. In order to fish legally, a fishing vessel has to have a licence. If the order is passed, each licence will stipulate the number of half days which a fishing boat will be allowed to spend at sea. That number will be based on the number of days the vessel spent at sea in 1991. Of course, no fisherman knew in 1991 that the number of days spent at sea would determine how many days he could spend at sea in the future and would become a condition of his licence to fish in our waters.

Many fishermen filled in log books and can document to some extent the number of days spent at sea in 1991, but many cannot. Many did not have to fill in EC log books. For example, fishermen fishing species for which there are no national quotas did not have to provide evidence or complete log books. For many of them, there is no documentary evidence on which to base the number of days which they will be allowed to spend at sea in future. That is acknowledged in paragraph 7 of the order, which is entitled

"Time spent fishing under the authority of a licence but not covered by written returns".

When we study that, we find that there is no evidence to be taken into account in some instances. It will be a purely arbitrary decision.

If we read the order further, we see a reference to "Exceptional circumstances". Of course there are exceptional circumstances. If we read through the list, it brings out how unworkable the order will be. I quote one example of exceptional circumstances:

"other factors leading to prolonged or repeated absence from work on the part of the master or any member of the crew of the vessel."

Let us be clear about it. Fishermen are like the rest of us. Some are more honest than others or, should I say,

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

some are more economical with the truth. Harsh decisions will be taken. Clearly, it is intended that if the order is to bite, it has to be restrictive. That means that many fishermen will be treated unfairly in relation to the number of days on which they will be allowed to fish. It is unworkable and unfair.

In the limited time available to me—many hon. Members wish to take part in this very short debate—I shall confine myself to a few questions. Why has the minimum allocation been fixed at 160 days? There must be some basis for that figure—*[Interruption.]* It is not an EC figure. Indeed, there is a quite different EC figure applying to decommissioning, which is 200 half days, representing 100 full days on which one must fish to be eligible for the EC decommissioning scheme.

I ask for a rough guide, so my question is reasonable. What will be the average number of days at sea for each licence? The minimum, as I said, will be 160, although the maximum, especially in circumstances in which there are two crews, could be higher than 330 days. The fishing industry is entitled to an indication of the average number of days-at-sea allowed under the proposals.

I urge the Minister to give an important undertaking about the application of the regime. Will he undertake that the days-at-sea restrictions will never prevent British fishermen from fulfilling their quotas? In other words, may we be assured that no fisherman will be denied the opportunity to exhaust his national quota as a consequence of the days at sea restrictions?

The fishing industry has for years campaigned for a decommissioning scheme. In those campaigns it has had the support of the Labour party and hon. Members on both sides of the House, including some Conservative Members who represent fishing communities. Over the years, however, the Conservative Government have consistently refused to introduce a decommissioning scheme.

I am glad to see the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in his place. In 1990, he said:

"I emphasise that decommissioning is not the way to reduce the pressure on fish stocks".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 1171].

Various versions of that statement have been repeated by Ministers in one debate after another. The Government have belatedly introduced what we would describe as a totally inadequate decommissioning scheme. The Select Committee on the European Communities in another place produced a valuable report nearly a year ago describing that scheme as too little, too late.

As a result of an amendment introduced during its passage, the parent legislation to the instrument that we are debating, the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992, states that, before considering what action to take,

"Ministers shall first give due consideration to a scheme of decommissioning in order to achieve a significant reduction in the capacity of the fishing fleet."

The Government's miserable decommissioning scheme was announced in February 1992. The Sea Fish (Conservation) Act received Royal Assent in December 1992. What consideration did the Government give to introducing an effective decommissioning scheme before the order now before the House was introduced? Where is the evidence that they gave the matter such consideration? Will their half-hearted decommissioning scheme, as we term it, achieve a reduction in fishing capacity? That, too, was challenged in the Select Committee report in another place.

Opposition Members are not against just this compulsory tie-up regime. We are against compulsory tie-up as a general proposition. We are against it because it is unfair. Many young skippers have borrowed large sums of money to buy vessels. How can it be right to force them, by such restrictions, into a situation in which they will not be able to earn enough money to make the loan repayments and cover their costs? Compulsory tie-up is economic nonsense. It inherently forces up fishing costs, so it cannot make sense as a long-term policy.

Compulsory tie-up threatens the safety of our fishermen. If a fisherman is fishing on the high seas and the weather suddenly deteriorates, he will go home, knowing that he can go out and fish again the next day. Once this scheme is in operation, however, and fishermen are out in adverse conditions, they will remember that they are only allowed to fish for so many days a year: they may not be able to return the next day. They will therefore try to catch as many fish as possible while they can. It is surely reasonable to argue that this will happen sometimes, so it is also reasonable to say that the regime will put our fishermen's lives at risk.

As anyone who knows the industry will confirm, the very possibility of the scheme coming into operation has led to boats cutting their crew members. Anyone who knows anything about fishing vessels knows that vessels with fewer crew members are not so safe as boats with full crews aboard. On safety grounds alone, therefore, the scheme is wrong.

We have a common fisheries policy, but compulsory tie-up will not apply to French or Spanish fishermen. What chance, then, of the scheme being acceptable to our fishermen when, for historical reasons, they find themselves competing against French, Irish and Spanish fishermen in the seas around this country? It is difficult for them to understand how that can be right under a common fisheries policy.

Conservation can work only if it has the support of the industry. Compulsory tie-up is unworkable. That is why the policy should be stopped in its tracks. The House can do that tonight, so I urge all hon. Members to join the Opposition in the Lobbies to vote down the order.

10.32 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): It is, I think, a matter of agreement that there is a crisis in the fish stocks. We know why. It is because fishermen are hunting a common resource, because there is no entry fee to that resource, because they hunt it competitively, and because, all the time, increased killing power is being brought in by new technology. One has only to look at *Fishing News* to see advertisements such as "Now fish can't hide"—because of the sheer weight of the technology deployed in the hunt for them.

The technology is improving all the time, and that has led to a crisis in the stocks. It is a worldwide, not just a European, crisis. The House will know that the Newfoundland cod fishery has been halted for two years because of the crisis in the cod stocks there. The Icelanders have cut their quotas radically because of the crisis in the

cod stocks. Ten years ago we pulled about 540,000 tonnes of cod from the Baltic; that quota is now down to 40,000 tonnes.

The crisis in the North sea is equally grave. The purpose of these measures is to protect our fish, by our means, for our fishermen. Even if there were no such thing as a common fisheries policy, even if we had a national 200-mile limit, I would still be here today defending measures to protect British fish. That is the reason for the order. It is not here because it was imposed by Brussels. It is certainly not a case of waiting until the stocks are utterly depleted just because others might not take the same action. We are introducing the measure because our stocks are threatened, and we have a duty to save them.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Minister has a difficult job, but how can he make global statements about the intensity of the fishing effort in the light of the fact that, until recently, the Government were giving grants in order to intensify the fishing effort? Why, throughout a debate that has now lasted for several years around the Bellwin scheme and related measures, has there been no movement at all towards recognising and supporting low-intensity fishing regimes which apply in certain parts of the country through a regional fishing policy?

The Minister talks about a national fishing policy and declaims against high-intensity fishing, but people with conservation-conscious fishing regimes get no local protection and support against such high intensity fishery regimes. If the hon. Gentleman moved towards a regional fishing policy, what he has just said would have more credibility.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman raises a point of genuine debate. One could look at fisheries in regional terms, but some in the United Kingdom fish all round the coast and others are regional. There will always be some conflict between them. There is no such thing as a fishing industry in Britain: there are half a dozen fishing industries. One of the problems facing any Fisheries Minister is to try to reconcile the competing claims of the elements of the industry. I recognise that there are difficult choices to be made. It is my job to stand here and defend the one that we have made.

Everywhere, Governments are struggling to find an answer to conservation. That is why they have been forced to intervene in an industry which is traditionally unregulated, fragmented and individual. We have to consider how to achieve conservation. It could partly be done by telling the industry to depend on self-discipline and self-regulation. That would be an easy solution—it would certainly be more convenient for Ministers—but it does not always work.

The industry is competitive. The producer organisations are not always willing to exercise a discipline over their members that would be helpful. There is a history of evasion. I do not wish to labour the point, but all of us know that that exists. Because fish are a common resource, not a property right, fishermen who act with restraint tend to lose out to those who do not act with restraint.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a history of evasion on the French side of the English channel as well, and that it is particularly important for fishermen such as those who operate out of the port of Shoreham and in the English channel, that the British Government keep a close eye on what is going on in the French ports and ensure that French and other fishermen are not evading the rules while our fishermen are obeying them?

Mr. Curry: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. That is why the first meeting between the new French Minister and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and myself was about fisheries. I do not wish to draw up a league table of comparative sin and virtue in the fishing industry, but I recognise clearly that fishermen across the world tend to be a breed; that is why Governments fact similar problems whether in Guinea-Bissau or the west coast of Scotland.

There are various ways of going about conservation. There is self-discipline and technical conservation. But we know that there is no single measure that will do the trick, because of the different ways in which stocks behave. We know that what would be necessary if we were to achieve all our objectives by technical conservation might well be further than the industry would be prepared to go.

We know also that the industry tends to be divided in its reponse to challenges. For example, we are consulting at the moment on whether we should ban the landing of small ungutted rounders—the basic white fish stocks. I need not be a prophet to forecast that we are unlikely to have a favourable response to that from all the different parts of the United Kingdom, although I can see the argument in favour of taking that particular measure.

We have set up a forum with the industry. It has had its first meeting. It has gone into working groups, and we hope to find concrete measures of technical conservation acceptable to everybody. We are willing to commit research money to doing work that might reveal how we can go forward with the industry.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said that many hon. Members wish to speak, and if I give way constantly, it will mop up the entire debate. As the House knows, I usually give way, but in these circumstances of a narrow debate I shall be rather more disciplined.

There is a buy-out. If one goes for a buy-out, one only buys time, because the technology is galloping along behind all the time. Countries with a long history of decommissioning have found that they still need to make further reductions. Decommissioning by itself simply has not delivered the trick. One has to do a lot of decommissioning before one starts cutting into the efficient catches. One tends to catch those who are committing the least attack on the stock. However, we believe that decommissioning has a role. We have accepted that it must form part of the package; that is why £25 million is available for decommissioning.

The order is only part of a package of measures. Days at sea will go back to back with decommissioning to make decommissioning into an effective conservation measure.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Has there been a change in recent years from the position that I remember so well? Every year, when the scientists made their recommendations about stocks, total allowable catches and quotas, the fishermen's lobbies, of which the British was not the least, came to all Ministers in the Council and pleaded for the TACs and quotas to be far

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

higher than the scientists had recommended. Because of the power of that lobby, Ministers often agreed TACs and quotas at a level higher than they felt was prudent.

Is it not fair to say that, as a result of that pressure and those decisions, the crisis that now confronts the industry is partly due to Ministers over the years and partly due to the irresponsible pressure of fishermen who would not face the crisis in years gone by and who now face a far bigger crisis?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. It has been the case that Ministers have succumbed to pressures in the past. They have been willing to edge up the TACs and the quotas to meet certain political pressures on them. That is one of the reasons why we have the crisis now. That option is no longer available to us.

The important point about the scheme is that it is a minimal scheme. It will come into operation in September or October. We want to issue the provisional allocations which will then give rise to the definitive allocations. The scheme will not come into force until September or October. It will then stand still until we are satisfied that other member states are fulfilling their obligations to reduce capacity. I emphasise this point. I do not have the slightest intention—the House would not permit me in any case—of inviting the House to take further measures unless it is clear that our Community partners are also taking measures to meet their targets. I have emphasised that from the beginning.

The position is well summed up in a newspaper from which I do not normally quote, and which does not normally mention me with great favour. The editorial in this week's *Fishing News* says:

"More money for decommissioning, much as the industry calls for it, is simply a political non-starter in the current climate."

It then states why there is no chance of getting more money for it. The editorial continues:

"On technical measures, again the Government is lukewarm. A major difficulty is the enforcement. The Government knows that fishermen are up to all the tricks in avoiding the impact of technical measures and hence have no faith in them as conservation measures. One reason why technical measures fail is that they are invariably imposed against the advice of the industry which then immediately sets about side-stepping them. The reason they are so often imposed is that fishermen cannot agree on what measures are required."

The editorial points out that a new federation has been formed in the north-east of England which may reflect certain disagreements with the national federation.

The editorial then points out, as the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) mentioned, the possibility of considering a regional fisheries policy. It concludes:

"If the industry is to fight tie-ups effectively and convincingly, it must have a realistic alternative. So far the alternatives put forward do not recognise the political realities and the complexities of fisheries management or the fragmentation and diversity of the industry."

That is the view of the industry's own house magazine.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): As a Conservative Member whose understanding of such matter is limited, I wonder whether the Minister could explain something to me. Am I right in thinking that the arrangements that he is announcing tonight will peg the 1993 quota at the 1991 days-at-sea level? Secondly—and more important—is he saying that he will not introduce any new resolution, as he said on 14 July 1992,

"unless we are satisfied that member states which share our fishery stocks are taking effective steps to meet their multi-annual guidance programme targets."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. 1027.]?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We have already had three interventions, all of them lengthy. We have a very limited time for the debate, and a number of hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Long interventions do not help.

Mr. Curry: I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the promises that we gave during the passage of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act are all being fulfilled. This measure represents a standstill on effort expressed in days at sea based on the 1991 figure. I shall explain what "based" means in a minute. We will not move from that position, and I will not invite the House to tighten that restriction until we are satisfied that other member states are meeting their own targets, set in the EC consultative group. I am delivering on that promise in precise terms.

The Government have a package of measures, including licensing under 10 m, the decommissioning scheme—using which we have to remove 55 per cent. of the target—and days at sea. As I said, it is minimal. We will also reintroduce grants for vessel safety equipment—for fitting radio beacons, for life rafts, for hand-held radios, flares and rockets.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) mentioned safety. Let me say to him very seriously that, this year, where there have been no restrictions in fishing, we have already seen a significant loss of life in the fisheries industry. A couple of weeks ago I was in Northern Ireland, where two lives were lost in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor). That happens even when there are no restrictions. Fishing is a hazardous business; there is loss of life in the fishery.

I shall not draw comparisons in respect of lives lost from one year to another, but I do not seriously believe that the present measure will tempt fishermen to risk their lives. I simply do not think that that is the case, and I hope that nobody will blame on this measure every single loss of life that occurs in the fishing industry. That would not be an intellectually honest thing to do.

What will happen now is as follows. The principles order clears the way to send forward the traditional allocations, based on 1991 figures, so that we can make up allocations for people who have been caught by exceptional circumstances in 1991. There will then be a period for informal representations, so that we may be informed of the adjustments that are necessary—for example, for the non-fishing effort.

I have received many representations in respect of boats that do oil rig work or white weeding in the Thames estuary, as well as those engaged in tourist activity and fishing for salmon and migratory trout. We have listened to those representations and will make allowance for such activities. We have also received representations concerning those areas where the data is not complete.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): In reiterating those assurances, which are most helpful, will my hon. Friend confirm that there will be no change whatever with regard to boats under 10 m? While he is collecting information,

can he assure the House that he has no plans, as far ahead as one can see, to apply the days-at-sea restrictions to the very large fleet of boats under 10 m?

Mr. Curry: We have of course completed the licensing of the fleet of boats under 10 m, and we will not introduce days-at-sea restrictions during the lifespan of the current multi-annual guidance programme target. Within that lifespan, we shall be able to review all our conservation measures, so I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

After the fishermen have had a month in which to make their representations, we will analyse those representations over two or three months, and then the full statutory instrument tribunal will be available.

The House will want to know that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland will be appointing Sir Michael Ogden QC as president of the Sea Fish Licence Tribunal. Sir Michael will commence work immediately on a part-time basis to assist us in finalising the arrangements for the tribunal's work and will then preside over its operation later in the year.

He has a great wealth of experience on which to draw, including 13 years as chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, acting as the assessor of compensation for miscarriages of justice for the Home Secretary and the Minister of Defence, and sitting as deputy High Court judge in the Queen's bench division in addition to his practice as Queen's counsel. I am confident that he will ensure that fishermen who wish to appeal will receive open, fair and impartial treatment. At the same time, I pay tribute to Judge Michael Coulson for his preliminary work in setting up the tribunal and pending the appointment of the tribunal.

We expect the allocations to operate from early September or October, and the days at sea will not be conterminous with the quota year. That will introduce an additional element of flexibility into the scheme. We have sought to have a flexible, effective and enforceable scheme. All the time spent at sea in 1991 will be counted. We will make an allowance for exceptional circumstances such as a breakdown or family bereavement, and will calculate in half days to permit flexibility to the fisherman. There will be the de minimis allocation. There will be allowances for vessels that are caught by the eight-day tie-up. I have observed the representations that I received on that matter.

We will go no further than this order unless we are satisfied that we are getting effective action from our partners. We will differentiate between sector and stock in deciding how to take the system forward in the circumstances that I have outlined—when our partners are moving forward and we have received from the House and another place the affirmative resolution that we have written into the rules.

The measure will be of practical benefit, because it gives well-defined quantity entitlements to fishermen. It can be targeted by a fishing area and method of fishing, and it is enforceable. It will give an economic benefit by curbing the race to fish and the simultaneous landings than can glut the market and help profitability when the stocks recover and the catch rates increase. It can provide the basis for rationalisation without increasing the exploitation rate.

The measure will be of conservation benefit, because it is essential for decommissioning to be effective. It will be a method of combating black fish landings and discarding when quotas have been exhausted. It will limit the exploitation of vulnerable non-quota fish. I must emphasis that all stocks around the United Kingdom are vulnerable —some are in grave crises. The case for the freeze on effort is absolutely open and shut for all the stocks around the United Kingdom.

The measure is for conversation and the future of the industry. Neither the Labour party nor the industry has offered us an effective alternative. The measure is a British method, devised with the British industry in view to preserve British stocks for British fishermen and carried through by the British Government. It is for the long-term future of the industry, and I urge the House to reject the Labour party's plea to reject it.

10.53 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The measure is an abomination, which should not have been proposed to the House in the first place. We should have had a decommissioning scheme four or five years ago, when Labour Members were asking for it, to tackle the problem of conservation directly. The Government will spend a massive amount on this order—the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has estimated about £8 million. That could be the kernel for a much bigger decommissioning which could be used more effectively and directly.

The Minister has approached the problems of fishing in an authoritarian way to conceal the consequences of his failure to introduce a decommissioning scheme years ago. Most consequences will be imposed on a fishing industry that will be driven into bankruptcy by having the days at sea limited in this way. I do not want the Minister to get away with the sort of salami tactics that he has adopted tonight, saying that it will be done bit by bit, with more proposals to come later. That is salami-ism.

When the Minister has such powers, they will be implemented. The days at sea will be gradually reduced in the same way as the total allowable catch was reduced, although the Minister told us that total allowable catches were an effective means of conservation. Once he has the powers, it follows automatically that the days at sea will be limited.

We are being asked to sign a blank cheque for a Minister who has demonstrated that he will not listen to the fishing industry. He is using an economically inefficient method of approaching the problems of the industry. It will result in huge sums of capital being tied up for days every year. The order will not be paralleled by European measures.

The Minister said that if the EC did not achieve multi-annual guidance programmes the Government would reconsider. Of course it will achieve them. It is because we are so far behind in ours that he is having to introduce this panic measure now. That is the problem. Will the Minister say that he will not implement the measure until similar measures and the same sort of limitations on days at sea are imposed on our continental competitors? If such limitations are not imposed on our competitors, what kind of spectacle will it be when our

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

fishing boats are tied up in port and our fishermen watch the fish being caught by French, Dutch and Danish fishermen?

Our fish are caught none the less. The conservation damage is caused none the less. The fish are caught in French, Dutch and Danish nets. They will simply not be caught by British fishermen, to be landed on the British market for the British industry. That is all that the Minister will achieve. He will give a bonanza to the Europeans, who are effectively uncontrolled because policing at their ports is not so strong, effective or clear-cut as in Britain. Can the Minister tell us that the fish that are not caught by our industry and are caught by our competitors will be effectively controlled at the port of landing? Of course he cannot. The Spanish will have a bonanza thanks to the order. The fish will die none the less.

Limiting days at sea is a wrong approach to the problems of the industry and it will bankrupt large swathes of it. The far more effective approach that the Minister should take is to consult the industry and work with it to impose conservation measures by selective gear—by increasing mesh sizes, using square mesh panels and implementing all the measures that the fishermen have proposed over the years.

Mr. Curry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: The Minister did not give way to me, so I shall not give way to him: I am sorry.

Only selective measures can achieve proper and effective conservation. The crude measure that the Government have introduced cannot do so. It will simply drive fishermen, when they are allowed to put to sea, to catch as much as they possibly can of everything they possibly can. That is the inevitable consequence of the measure.

Having obtained the powers, the Minister should consult the industry so that proper and effective conservation can be achieved. He should work out a joint approach with the industry. That is the only way to do it. The Minister is going in for a Ceausescu approach to the problems in the fishing industry.

There is a problem with the vessels that have caught non-pressure stocks and, therefore, have not been required to keep records. Some allowance has to be made for such vessels. The only way to do so is to give them a notional allowance. They cannot be asked to develop records that do not exist.

The Grimsby fishing industry fishes by passive fishing with large mesh sizes of more than 110 mm. It is conservation conscious. It is a conservation-effective industry. When the Minister comes to exercise discretion —as he will, because at some stage he will have to discriminate—he should advance the claims of those sections of the fishing industry that are the most conservation conscious and conservation efficient.

I make a plea to the Minister. The measure came before the spirit of the Newbury noes. It is the sort of authoritarian measure that the Prime Minister has told us, having heard the voice of the people, the Government will avoid. They will consult and work with people. They will not be authoritarian. They will not impose their wishes on the people any more. Why does not the Minister join in that process in dealing with the fishing industry? I give the assurance that, if he does not, the fishing industry will be sour, intractable and unco-operative and there will be enormous difficulty in implementing the measure.

The order will require massive bureaucracy. It will require much extra spending that would not be necessary if conservation were achieved with the co-operation of the industry. That is my plea to the Minister. He has the powers. He should hold off and co-operate with the industry to get a better deal.

I also make a plea to Conservative Members from fishing ports. There is an enormous weight of responsibility on their shoulders. There are not many Members of Parliament from fishing constituencies. Fishing is a beleaguered industry. Conservative Members would not do this to any other section of the communities that they represent. Those Members would not require pubs, banks or shops to close three or four days a week. They would not dare to do that. Why do that to the fishing industry? Why do they treat the industry in that fashion? The industry does not have many people to speak for it and those Members should have the guts to speak for it tonight.

10.59 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I do not know why the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) pointed at me in particular as he concluded his speech, because my opposition to the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 and to the order is well known and recognised.

I do not record my opposition to the Act in a boastful spirit, but with great sadness. I agreed wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and I also agreed with some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, although he was far too emotional about the subject.

When the Act was passed, I had hoped that the relevant orders, of which this is the first, would not be introduced to implement the powers under it. I had hoped for a response from my hon. Friend the Minister and from the industry so that we could avoid implementation of the restrictions on days at sea through the imposition of a compulsory tie-up. I honestly do not believe that the orders and the Act represent the right way in which to achieve conservation. If I thought that they would work, I would join my hon. Friend the Minister in the Lobby. I do not believe that they represent the right approach. *[Interruption.]* I ask Opposition Members to be quiet, please. This is a serious matter and they are not helping the fishing industry.

The need for conservation is beyond doubt. My hon. Friend the Minister is right about that and the industry also acknowledges it. If I am critical of my hon. Friend the Minister—I believe that he has been treated unfairly in this business and that a lot of unnecessary blame has been put on him—I am also disappointed that that industry has not responded with counter-proposals to the tie-up.

When the fishermen held a large rally in Westminster Hall in July, I was greeted with fairly cheap applause, because I had done that popular thing by opposing the then Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill. I said to those fishermen that they should not applaud me because their industry not only had to oppose the Bill but produce counter-proposals. It is a source of great sadness to me that it has not done that with a united voice.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Yes, it has.

Mr. Harris: My good friend from Scotland says that it has. I accept that that is true of certain areas and I pay tribute to the leaders of the fishing industry in the south-west, who have produce alternatives, at least tentatively, to solve this difficult subject. They have suggested closed areas in which no fishing should take place in spawning seasons. That is eminently sensible. I also agreed with their suggested technical measures.

The industry, unfortunately, has not spoken with one voice and that is why, over the years, it has done itself a great disservice. The lack of unity has been apparent on many issues apart from conservation. I realise that there are as many different views about fishing as there are fishermen in any port, but the industry must get together, particularly in the light of what the Government are imposing tonight.

If the industry produced viable proposals and if my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government were prepared to listen, we could develop a better means of conserving fish than that proposed.

I welcome the setting up of the conservation forum. I agree that it will not be easy to get agreement in it, but I again echo what was said by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby—we really must try, even at this late hour, to secure agreement on other ways of approaching conservation.

In commending the order, my hon. Friend the Minister said that its objective was to protect our fish by our means for our fishermen. The difficulty, particularly in an area like area 7, the south-west, is with the last bit of that objective, "for our fishermen". In area 7, for the most important species, we have in some cases only 12 per cent. of the total allowable catch and the rest belongs, in quota terms, to the boats of other member states. If our fishermen are prevented from fishing to the full, others will go on fishing and fish will not be conserved.

My hon. Friend the Minister is going to get up and I will certainly give way to him. I pay tribute to him because he has said that he will recognise these regional differences, and that is a very important point. I come back to a point made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). We cannot impose a national system of control here. We need to approach the problem in a regional fashion. The situation in my part of the world is completely different from the situation in Scotland. We must therefore have regional flexibility. I know that my hon. Friend is working on that, and I think that he wants to intervene.

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have no wish to take up his time. On the share of stocks in the south-west, I recognise that it is a different fishery from the fishery around the north-east coast, areas 4 and 6, where the stocks are the most vulnerable, but the 12 per cent. figure must be treated with some care. The United Kingdom's share is as follows: sole in the western channel, 59 per cent.; sole in the Bristol channel, 28 per cent.; plaice in the English channel, 29 per cent.; nephrops in area 7, 33 per cent.; and mackerel in the western area, 56 per cent. Boats in the south-west catch much higher-value species than do those fishing off most of the coasts.

Mr. Harris: I accept that, and my hon. Friend will note that I picked my words with some care and used the phrase "for the most important species". But the point has been made.

After dealing with the general point, I turn to some detailed criticisms of the order. The first point has already been made fairly by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East: how on earth we are to give days at sea to those people who have no track record through log books? That difficulty will cause enormous friction because to some extent the decision will be arbitrary.

There is also the cost of implementation. The Ministry has used a figure of £1·5 million a year, but I believe that the cost will be much higher than that given in the explanatory memorandum.

Then there is the biggest issue of all for me when it comes to unfairness—the wretched flag of convenience quota-hoppers. How on earth are we to impose days at sea restrictions on boats that come out of Corunna or Vigo? We cannot put those restrictions on them, and my hon. Friend and his officials know that. Therefore, I am not prepared, on that ground alone, to support a measure in which we agree that, although the quota-hoppers are covered, there is not yet a means of controlling them but in which we are going to impose restrictions on my fishermen from Newlyn and fishermen from other ports around Cornwall. For that reason alone, I could not, in all conscience, vote with my hon. Friend the Minister, although I have the greatest admiration for him.

I beg my hon. Friend just to think again on this matter. There is still time. I beg the industry to give up the protests, put them on one side and start serious talks with the Ministry so that at last we can find a sensible solution to what is undoubtedly a difficult and complex problem.

11.9 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) is right to say that there should be serious talks. However, for the talks ever to take place, the Government must show a willingness to retreat from the hard-line attitude that they have taken, with their claims that effort limitation is the only way that they will achieve the necessary targets. They know that effort limitation will do precious little for conservation. The Minister talked about discards. I challenge him to show me one paragraph in the order that will make the least difference to the number of discards that are going back into the sea.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the route that the Government have taken is an inefficient way to pursue conservation ends. It ties up the capital of business men for days in a way that would be unacceptable in any other industry. The people employed on vessels will be unemployed for those days, and we know of the difficulties that many have experienced when they have tried to draw unemployment benefit for those days.

The Government's route is also an inflexible way to pursue conservation objectives. The hon. Member for St. Ives spoke of the western approaches. My understanding is that although, a year to 18 months ago, there was a view that boats should be tied up 30 per cent. of the days to meet conservation ends, that has now been reduced to 8 per cent. There is no way that the order can take any account of those changes.

The Minister said that, when the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 was being drawn up, the quota for haddock in the North sea was small. That quota has now gone up from 55,000 tonnes to 133,000 tonnes, but we still have an inflexible system. The Minister said that he

[Mr. James Wallace]

would not wish to see quota uncaught because boats were obliged to stay in port. I hope that, when he answers, he will tell us where that promise is implemented in the orders. Having a calendar year for days-at-sea restrictions that differs from the one for quotas will lead to confusion rather than to the flexibility that the Minister claimed that he wants.

Furthermore, the situation facing the pelagic sector shows how ludicrous the order is. We are told that the sector will be affected by days-at-sea restrictions as well, but why? The Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association has sent to some hon. Members a letter that it recently received, dated 11 May, from the Sea Fish Industry Authority, which says:

"on the basis of the information to hand, it seems as though the Pelagic segment has already reduced capacity since 1.1.92 sufficiently to meet the MAGP requirements."

Why, in heaven's name, is that sector having restrictions imposed on it when it has met multi-annual guidance programme requirements and when, on the evidence of last year's figures, it was not able to catch all the herring and mackerel in the quota when it had no restrictions? How will it be able to do that when it does have restrictions? The Minister must answer that fundamental question.

I entirely endorse the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. He asked what was the logic of 160 half days. The Minister did not tell us. I suspect that it is a period that would not allow any boat to be viable if that were all the time that it was allowed to go out. However, there will be a number of add-ons.

The Minister reaffirmed his commitment that there will be no order to reduce the number of days agreed for 1993 unless there is clear evidence that other countries are effectively implementing their MAGP targets as well. While our fishermen are restricted, it does not matter that other European countries are not effectively pursuing their MAGP targets, so while our fishermen are tied up, the fishermen of other EC states—Spain, France and Denmark—will be able to carry on fishing. Just because the Minister says that he will not bring in anything more restrictive, that does not hide the fact that there is no way in which our boats can increase the number of days when they can go to sea.

We shall have fixed and rigid restrictions which will mean the opposite of conservation for those who have relatively few days at sea. Those who in 1991 were running double crews and were at sea all the time will benefit, whereas the Clyde fishermen who tie up over the weekends will lose out. The boats with fewer days at sea will find that the monetary value of their licences will be devalued.

When the Bill was passed in the other place, their Lordships insisted that the order could not be introduced until the Government had given due consideration to the contribution of decommissioning in promoting conservation. The Government believe that a few words in the preamble to the order represent a magic incantation which will get around the statutory hurdle. The Minister has a duty to tell the House what consideration the Government gave to decommissioning.

Given the feelings in the industry, it is inevitable that someone will take the decision to judicial review. Following the decision in the House of Lords in the case of Pepper *v.* Hart that proceedings in the House can be used in evidence, the Minister should tell us what consideration was given to decommissioning.

The hon. Member for St. Ives highlighted the fact that it will be difficult to control foreign vessels or those flying flags of convenience coming out of other ports. They are getting a bonus from the orders as they are getting 1988 as their base year; they are having their cake and eating it and the Government have not explained why.

There has been no explanation of whether oral evidence will be acceptable in the absence of written documentation. We believe that it should be and we hope that when regulations on the sea fish tribunals are introduced, it will be made perfectly clear that oral evidence will be acceptable.

What will we be saying that our fishermen should have been doing? The scheme envisages that British fishermen are a race apart, and in a sense they are, but they will need a practising lawyer on board to decipher some aspects of the order. In 1991, they needed to be fortune tellers to know that what they had to keep then would apply to them in 1993, and they will have to be the most brilliant businessmen to squeeze enough out of 160 half days a year to remain commercially viable.

The order is no way to approach fisheries conservation. The industry has called year after year for decommissioning. It has been supported by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. The fact that for years the Government were deaf to their calls means that the industry is now being lumbered with a most inflexible and inefficient method of conservation which I believe will sour relationships between the Government and industry when what is needed is constructive dialogue.

11.17 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Hon. Members have mentioned the recent tragedy in Northern Ireland. I salute the memory of those two young men, one of whom was my constituent from Bushmills in County Antrim. He was a young man who wanted to fish from his earliest days. He went straight from school into a Government training scheme and for the seven years of his working life was engaged in fishing. He met with a tragic freak wave which swept him and his companion to their deaths.

The fishermen of Northern Ireland and their federation have stated that if the order is passed it will increase tragedies among fishermen by requiring them to fish in adverse weather conditions as there will be times when the only days when fishermen are permitted to fish will be those when the weather is bad. We have enough problems in the fishing industry without sending men out in adverse conditions.

The order will cause widespread unemployment among fishermen and the fish processing industry. It will also disadvantage British fishermen. I cannot accept the Minister's argument that he is preserving British fish; he is preserving British fish for other European countries to fish them. The Minister's argument strikes me as very preverse.

The order will introduce an unjust system, forcing our fishermen to fish in bad weather at a time when United Kingdom fishermen must comply rigidly with the quotas —far more rigidly than any other EC fishing nation. It is no use the Minister talking to the French ambassador; French fishermen will continue to fish in our waters while our boats are tied up. The Minister should withdraw the

order and ensure that it is not introduced until all EC countries submit to the same rules. He should tell those countries that they would not have a common fisheries industry without our waters; the British waters made that industry. The money to be spent on civil servants to operate the scheme should be transferred to the decommissioning scheme.

If we introduce conservation in the way suggested by the order, our fishing industry will have a sad future. The fishermen of Northern Ireland are totally opposed to the order.

11.21 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is a great shame that there has been so little time for this important debate, in which many hon. Members wanted to speak. Even after tonight, the issue will not go away; it has already been debated for a long time.

The Opposition cannot support the order, for reasons given by hon. Members on both sides of both Houses. It is both bureaucratic and expensive. Will the Government provide financial help for the many fishermen who will have to appeal against it? Will they note rulings made in the European Court about similar measures relating to allocation of days at sea for those who have no track records? The measure will not necessarily meet conservation objectives; it will discriminate against fishermen who have put less pressure on fish stocks, while rewarding those who have done the opposite. As has already been said, it has implications for crewing and safety, and it is not supported by any section of the industry.

The decommissioning element is grossly inadequate, amounting to £25 million over three years. The French fleet was given that much in a single year. There is also the issue of complying with assurances given during the passage of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992. Under new section (6D)—the Act amends an earlier 1967 Act—before considering the measure relating to days at sea,

"Ministers shall first give due consideration to a scheme of decommissioning in order to acheive a significant reduction in the capacity of the fishing fleet."

Where is that consideration? Where is the "significant reduction" in the fleet? A paltry £25 million goes nowhere near such an objective.

What about the Minister's assurance that there would be a level playing field between our fishing fleet and those of other European member states—an assurance that he gave the House on 14 July last year? While our fishermen face being tied up in port, their competitors are free to fish as widely as they wish.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I am sorry; there is not enough time.

Because foreign fleets receive more generous funding, they are in a position to move into our fleets—to buy up British licences and expand their quota-hopping operations.

We believe that there is an alternative to this measure: working with the industry to introduce technical conservation measures, gear types, selectivity, and bans on industrial fishing. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) pointed out that fishermen themselves have suggested sensible measures, advocating retention lengths, minimum landing sizes and a ban on twin rigs. I believe that it is possible, by co-operating with the fishermen, to introduce measures that will work.

The measure is a marine set-aside without compensation. It is institutionalised bankruptcy for our fishing fleet. Many people have debts, having taken out loans to increase their capacity, supported by the very Government who are taking away the possibility for them to earn a decent living.

I urge all hon. Members to vote against the order. Let us reject it, not in a negative way but in a positive way to bring back to the House a decent measure which meets conservation objectives, which has the co-operation of all fishermen, which has the support of all sides of the House and which will meet the objects of a substainable fishing industry, which the order fails to do.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Feelings are running very high on this issue. Many hon. Members from fishing constituences have been unable to speak. Clearly the debate has not been extensive enough, given the importance of the issue. May I ask you to exercise your powers under Standing Order 15(2) and adjourn the debate to the next sitting day?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not prepared to exercise those powers.

11.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I should say to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) that the only way to bankrupt the fishing industry is to ensure that there are no fish. That is what is so sad about the debate. As one who has been involved in conservation legislation, both privatee Members' Bills and Government legislation, in the House over 20 years or more, I find it sad to hear Opposition Members bandying the word "conservation" about while not being prepared to put forward any scheme that will work.

If we are to maintain a sound fishing industry, it is essential that we conserve fish. On legislation dealing with livestock, we have always taken scientific advice. The scientific advice in the fishing world shows that our stocks are vulnerable and that we have to conserve them very carefully. We must accept that neither total allowable catches nor the quota can do the job alone, and that the methods in the order are the best way forward.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): My hon. Friend talks of conservation. In the Clyde, the fishermen took heed of that. They imposed their own weekend ban over a number of years. Now that means that they have not got days at sea recorded in 1991. Will my hon. Friend confirm that consideration will be given to that point and that he will take positive account of the days when they could have been at sea which were not recorded because of that self-imposed ban for conservation purposes?

Sir Hector Monro: The fishermen in the Clyde will be able to have the same fishing pattern as they did in 1991 but, as they have a statutory ban, which is an exceptional circumstance, we can consider it under paragraph 9(2)(d). We shall certainly consider it carefully under the special exception clause.

Mr. McGrady *rose*——

Sir Hector Monro: The main message that Opposition Members do not seem to appreciate is that there will not be a reduction in fishing effort; there will merely be a standstill on where we were in 1991. We would not reduce the amount of fishing effort without bringing forward an affirmative resolution. There is no possibility of a reduction in fishing effort taking place without further debate in the House.

Mr. McGrady *rose*——

Sir Hector Monro: I hope, too, that Opposition Members will appreciate the exceptional care and trouble that will be taken in reaching the days at sea arrangement. The Department will be writing too all licence holders, who will have time to respond to the details on the computer printout and subsequently have discussions with the Department before the number of days at sea on the licence is fixed. Subsequent to that, they will have a right of appeal to the tribunal.

We had demonstrations last winter about running out of quota. The worst way to react now would be to have a free-for-all, with no check on fishing around our coast. We are putting forward a practical conservation package. It would be foolhardy to throw that out tonight. I hope that the House will support the order, in the interests of conservation.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 283.

Division No. 265] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hicks, Robert
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan

Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and
Mr. Andrew Mackay.

Question accordingly negatived.

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th May, the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion moved by Mr James Arbuthnot on 2nd April relating to Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill not later than half-past Eleven o'clock or one and a half hours after the resumption of those proceedings, whichever is the earlier; and the said proceedings may continue after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Co-operatives (European Community)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

11.43 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The importance attached by the British co-operative movement to a European co-operative statute is shown tonight by the presence of the co-operative parliamentary group, with the exception of one member, from the House of Commons. We have 14 members from this House and four members from the other place.

Our task in this debate is to ascertain the Government's attitude to a European statute and to persuade the Minister to say that the Government have no serious objections to a European legal framework for co-operatives and will ultimately support the approval of the statute in the Council of Ministers.

I hope that it will be helpful if I briefly set out the background to the creation of the European co-operative statute. In 1989, the European commission became aware of a potential problem in the Community for co-operatives wishing to enter cross-border trading under existing and future regulations. It was also anxious to ensure that co-operatives were aware of their eligibility for finance under the co-operative regional and social fund. The Commission stated:

"the question may therefore arise at Community level of harmonising certain national provisions in order to improve the conditions of access to European markets for mutual societies, co-operatives and similar enterprises."

For that reason, it was willing to consider whether a special statute should be set up for the co-operative and mutual sector

"which would facilitate grouping operations, in conditions similar to those available to public limited companies under the European company proposal."

In other words, to use last year's buzz phrase, it would create a level playing field within the single market.

The statute would allow the creation of a supra-national co-operative society by two or more existing national co-operative societies as long as each had its headquarters in a different member state and had a minimum of 1,000 ecu. The statute passed through the European Parliament on 22 January, but it still has to go through the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his excellent speech. Is he aware that the Co-operative Insurance Society represents 14 per cent. of the total insurance market in Europe and that an astonishing 4 million people are represented by it?

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I am sure that the importance of co-operation in insurance is recognised, as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): Is my hon. Friend aware that there are 45,000 worker and producer co-operatives in the EC, which employ almost 750,000 people?

Mr. Turner: That information speaks for itself and, again, shows the importance of the co-operative sector in our economy.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a fund under the statute that allows for

the development of co-operatives across Europe? Surely the Government would be in favour of that. It would be a fund similar to the Co-operative Development Agency over which the Government presided and to which they gave funds. We want diversity, choice and competition in our economy.

Mr. Turner: I am sure that the Minister has taken note of those comments which, again, show the importance of the co-operative system.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will my hon. Friend press the Minister to ensure that the Government are aware of the innovative proposals in the statute that would allow European co-operatives to issue investors' shares and non-users' shares in addition to the traditional redeemable and transferable power value shares?

Mr. Turner: That is an important aspect of the recommendations in the statute.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Is my hon. Friend aware that co-operative banks have a 17 per cent. share of the market in the EC and that our own, dear Co-operative bank has more than 1·5 million customers?

Mr. Turner: That speaks for itself. I hope that the Minister has taken note of that important fact.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to draw to the Minister's attention the importance and weight of the co-operative sector, which has been illustrated by several comments. Is it not of the greatest importance that the European co-operative statute would run parallel to the European companies statute? It will therefore create a level playing field between the co-operative and private sector of the economy, which is surely consistent with what we all seek within Europe and the United Kingdom. Will my hon. Friend invite the Minister to mention that aspect?

Mr. Turner: I will most definitely take the opportunity to invite the Minister to comment positively on that aspect in his speech.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way yet again—in the middle of his speech, I hope. May I remind him that there are no fewer than 15 million members of co-operatives in the European Community, owning no fewer than 16,000 shops with an annual turnover—this shows our European credentials—of about 25 billion ecu? Some 8 million of those members are in the United Kingdom, and they own 4,650 shops, 90 of which are super-stores. Will my hon. Friend respond?

Mr. Turner *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hope that hon. Members will now act in a more dignified and serious way.

Mr. Turner: I hope that we are treating the matter in a serious and dignified way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that that is what all my hon. Friends who are here to represent the co-operative movement are doing. The reason why we are taking the matter so seriously is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) has just said, we speak for 8 million consumers—8 million subscribing members of co-operatives who are looking forward to a new development that will extend co-operation across frontiers and enable our co-operatives to meet up with many more millions of co-operatives over in Europe.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As my hon. Friend knows, I represent a rural constituency. I am sure that he will be aware that, in the common market, more than half the agricultural production is harvested and processed by co-operatives —indeed, the Co-operative Wholesale Society is the biggest farmer in the United Kingdom. Does my hon. Friend accept that we are talking not just about retail and banking activity but about agricultural production?

Mr. Turner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments, which again explain how important it is that the co-operative statue is granted and that it becomes a reality.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that large numbers of people work in the co-operative retail sector? I understand that there are about 200,000 in the European Community as a whole and that some 81,000 of them work in retail co-operatives in this country.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I do not represent a rural constituency. We have had a large number of problems in the co-operative movement in recent years, but, despite the recession and the economic problems faced by the whole retail sector, the retail side of the co-operative movement is still there. It is to be hoped that, over the next few years, under a Labour Government, it will be able to rebuild and re-establish itself as it should, not just in Britain but in co-operation with other co-operative retail societies and their equivalents in other European countries.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. With 81,000 employees in Great Britain, the co-operative movement is a very significant employer. It has a great responsibility in terms of employment—not just for those 81,000 jobs but for the many thousands of other jobs throughout the country which are linked to co-operative purchasing or which rely on co-operatives.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I do not represent a rural constituency. I represent a shipbuilding constituency, which will remain a shipbuilding constituency, thanks to the co-operation and help of many of my colleagues. Is my hon. Friend aware that 31 per cent. of the food market in Denmark and about 8 per cent. in Great Britain is supplied by consumer co-operatives? We do not agree that those figures are admirable—they should be increased.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I hope that the Minister has taken note of that significant information, because it has a great bearing on the campaign that we are waging in co-operatives in the United Kingdom to become part of the wider co-operatives movement in Europe.

I hope that the powerful case that has been made by my colleagues from the co-operative parliamentary group has convinced the Minister of the fairness in creating a level playing field between co-operative and mutual businesses

[Mr. Turner]

and private European companies in the single market. On behalf of all my colleagues in the co-operative parliamentary group and the wider co-operative movement, I sincerely hope that the Minister can support——

Mr. Sheerman: I shall comment on not only the content of my hon. Friend's speech but the serious and dignified way in which he delivered it. This Adjournment debate has been used probably in a better humoured and more informed way than most Adjournment debates—it gives credit to the Adjournment debate rather than anything else and I congratulate him on so using it.

Mr. Turner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments.

In all our deliberations in the co-operative movement, I hope that we will approach these matters in a dignified and businesslike way, yet, at the same time, recognise the human side of the way in which our co-operative movement operates. We are about people—we put people first. I hope that the Government will recognise that in their consideration of our needs and that the Minister will support the case that we have made.

11.56 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) on securing this Adjournment debate on the regulation of co-operatives in the European Community. In doing so, I shall add a word of congratulations to the phalanx of supporters who surround him on this occasion. The performance of Labour Members in this Adjournment debate would have done credit to a champion team of tag wrestlers. Although the Labour Benches are more populated than the Conservative Benches, I am sure that the sentiments expressed by hon. Members about the importance and extent of the co-operative movement, the community contribution that it makes in a variety of ways and its size will be echoed and shared by many Conservative Members.

I know about the long interest of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East in this subject, his life time involvement in the co-operative movement and his continuing strong interest in co-operatives, both in the House and outside. He is still chairman of the parliamentary co-operatives group. In that capacity, he and other hon. Members—it is an all-party group—make an important contribution in making the Government and Parliament aware of the important contribution of co-operatives. I share the hon. Gentleman's view of the importance of the co-operative sector in the United Kingdom and take note of his arguments in favour of the European co-operative statute, which is currently under negotiation.

I am well aware of the success enjoyed by many types of mutual organisations, including co-operatives. As the hon. Gentleman knows, most organisations in Great Britain that conduct their business according to the co-operative principles choose to register under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. There are more than 11,000 such societies, with a total membership of more than 10 million and total assets well in excess of £30 billion. Retail societies provide services to almost 7 million members. They range from corner shops to supermarkets and department stores, as well as public houses and hotels. Other societies cover an enormous diversity of activities.

The traditional values on which co-operatives are based, including the promotion of mutual self-help, may seem to some to be rather out of step with the current highly competitive markets in which many of them operate. But the large number of people who continue to enjoy the benefits of membership clearly demonstrate that co-operatives still have a useful role to play. The Government believe that co-operative values are worth protecting and fostering. Co-operation and competition go hand in hand and history has shown that the movement has faced many challenges and has demonstrated the flexibility, willingness and ability to adapt to those changes.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East highlighted the EC proposals, particularly those for a European co-operative statute and the advantages that it may offer to co-operative organisations which operate in more than one member state, or which are contemplating doing so. The statute is one of three related proposals made by the Commission on organisations in the co-operative, mutual, voluntary and charitable sectors—the so-called economie sociale.

The stated aim of the Commission is, as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East said, to create a level playing field for those organisations by allowing them to take advantage of the single market on an equal footing with companies, without having to convert and so lose their current status and character. The Commission has also made it clear that it believes that the statutes form a coherent package and that it expects them to be implemented simultaneously.

The content of the economie sociale statutes and the speed with which discussions on them proceed will depend heavily on developments on the company statute. However, several working group meetings have already taken place in Brussels and officials have embarked on the first article-by-article reading of the co-operative statute.

A year ago, the Government submitted an explanatory memorandum to Parliament, which set out our preliminary views on the Commission's proposals. We agreed that organisations in the economie sociale should be free to take advantage of the single market, but we expressed some doubts that national bodies wishing to operate in more than one member state experienced difficulties in doing so and that there was a useful role for the new legislation proposed by the Commission to play.

To determine the extent to which there was a need, or demand, for EC legislation on the economic sociale, the Government undertook a consultation exercise last year. A wide range of organisations in the co-operative, mutual and charitable sectors was consulted. About 1,200 consultation documents went out to those involved. Views were sought on a variety of issues including the extent of problems under the existing legal framework, the advantages and disadvantages of the statutes and the likelihood that organisations would make use of them. Comments were also invited on the detailed provisions of the statutes and on their interaction with the current EC and national laws.

The Government are now analysing carefully the responses to the consultative document. Officials in the

relevant Departments are considering the policy implications of the comments that we have received. Several detailed responses were received and a few meetings have already been held between officials and respondents, including a particularly helpful exchange of views with the United Kingdom Co-operative Council, which represented the views of the co-operative movement in its submissions.

It is clear from the speech and the interventions that have been made tonight that the consultation document and the future of the co-operative movement have attraccted close attention from Members of Parliament. Judging by the importance which they attached to the size and influence of the movement, I hope that they will continue to take part in the consultation process as the Government work on the policy implications of the statute.

I noted in particular and welcomed the important contributions made to tonight's debate by the hon. Members for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase), for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) and for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson). What a roll of honour. I hope that I have not missed anyone out.

I hope that we shall shortly be in a position to present a further explanatory memorandum to Parliament, reporting the results of the consultation exercise. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East will understand that it would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail on this, or the implications of the exercise for the United Kingdom's negotiating position. I should like to respond, however, to the points that he has raised by making some general remarks about the Government's policy.

Our view remains that co-operatives and other organisations in the economie sociale should be able to take full advantage of the single market. I believe that the hon. Gentleman shares that view. But we need to gauge carefully, by examining the results of the consultation exercise and from our other contacts with the relevant national organisations, whether they are keen to operate throughout the Community, whether they already do so and, if so, what problems, if any, they are facing.

To the extent that difficulties exist in carrying on cross-border activities, we then need to assess whether the Commission's proposals offer the best way of dealing with them. Among other things, we will have to weigh up carefully the perceived advantages of the new legal framework that the statutes offer, against the cost to member states of having to set up and administer separate regulatory systems or tax regimes for European entities.

It is also essential that the legislation does not compromise the checks and controls provided by the present framework of national legislation, nor contain loopholes which could be exploited by the unscrupulous. We need to make sure that the statutes provide adequate protection for members of the new entities, as well as for those who have dealings with them.

I would not want to pretend that the negotiations on the statutes is a straightforward task, but in that connection, we will be looking closely at the responses we have received to questions in the consultative document on transfer of registered office from one member state to another, on arrangements for supervising the new bodies, on accounting and auditing provisions and on insolvency proceedings. We shall also, of course, want to ensure that those organisations that choose not to operate as a European entity do not suffer any unfair disadvantage compared with those that do.

I have already cited the examples of possible drawbacks and dangers. We must try, at all cost, to avoid some of them. The proposals raise many complex issues which need to be discussed and satisfactory solutions found. Moreover, national legislation in this area varies considerably between member states and opinions tend to differ on even the most apparently basic concepts—such as defining the activities and constitution of a co-operative society.

In our negotiations we will need to bear in mind this background of very different national legislation, varying levels of regulation and different types of organisation across the Community. We must be sure that whatever is to be agreed will work well both in the United Kingdom and in other member states.

It might be suggested that the Government are adopting an unduly cautious approach to the Commission's proposals for legislation on co-operatives and other organisations in the economie sociale. But I think that it is vital to establish at an early stage what difficulties the proposals are designed to address, what opportunities they seek to offer to national entities and whether those entities are likely to take advantage of the opportunities made available to them. Having done that, it is only right to try to anticipate the potential dangers and problems which the proposals raise, alongside the obvious advantages, and to provide constructive criticism.

Let me stress, however, that in all our deliberations, the Government are driven first and foremost by a keen interest in the welfare of co-operatives and of other organisations in the economie sociale sector.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Can I persuade the Minister to explain to the House some of the dangers that he foresees when co-operatives work across national boundaries, as the Commission has suggested? He has referred to those dangers several times, but I am unaware of them, as, I suspect, are many of my colleagues. It would help the House if the Minister could tell us.

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) for intervening. I have tried to identify some of them during my remarks. There are certain problems associated with the rights of organisations to come into this country under the banner of being a European co-operative organisation under this statute, and we would have to be satisfied that they met the same stringent standards as are subscribed to by the co-operative movement already established in this country. That is one thing on which we would need to be satisfied.

Perhaps more controversially, there are the difficulties that we still envisage within the accompanying directive on worker participation which would go with the statute in this area. Perhaps I could just say a brief word about that in particular, because the experience of the company statute, which has been under discussion for many years now, shows how difficult it can be to reach agreement in this area. The rationale behind the co-operative statute

[Mr. Nelson]

and the two related proposals is to give organisations in the co-operative, mutual and voluntary sectors the same competitive opportunities as companies. Unless agreement is reached on the European company statute, the case for pushing ahead with the economic sociale proposals will be seriously weakened. However, a number of problems remain unresolved on the European statute, including, in particular, important political differences between member states on the provisions for compulsory worker participation in any European company formed under the statute.

The Commission's proposals for co-operatives and other economic social organisations also contain provisions for compulsory worker participation which are likely to cause similar problems for the United Kingdom. These are contained in directives which form part of the three statutes.

The involvement of employees is a vital component in the business plan of all forward-looking companies and organisations wishing to compete effectively in the expanding European market of the 1990s. The United Kingdom is firmly committed to the principle of employers informing and, where appropriate, consulting their employees about matters which affect them. The traditional voluntary approach, which has worked so well for us here, gives employers and employees the flexibility to agree, at local level, the employee involvement arrangements that suit them best.

We will take careful note of all the comments that we have received here tonight and also outside the House. As far as possible, and where they are consistent with wider Government concerns, we will try to reflect respondents' views in the stance that we adopt towards the Commission's proposals. In the final analysis, our decisions will be influenced by the desire to avoid adding to the administrative burden on co-operatives and other organisations that come under the economie sociale banner.

Above all, we must avoid falling into the trap of letting a desire for a level playing field overwhelm the need for a practical and workable approach to the regulation of co-operatives and others, both in the United Kingdom and throughout the European Community. In finding a way forward, we will continue to rely on the helpful and thoughtful contribution, as well as the extensive experience, of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East and his Friends.

Mr. Turner: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I, on behalf of all my parliamentary colleagues, express sincere thanks to the Minister for his positive and encouraging speech tonight? We just hope that he will use his good offices to seek to bring to a speedy and successful conclusion the implementation of the statute. I thank him sincerely for his thoughtful and helpful contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Eritrea

1. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the recognition of Eritrea; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We warmly welcome the outcome of the referendum on Eritrea's status. We plan to announce our decision on diplomatic recognition by the time the Eritreans formally declare their independence.

Mr. Barnes: Immediately after recognition, should not Eritrea be given massive economic aid from the world community? It has suffered considerably from the civil war which has destroyed its infrastructure, it suffered from a drought last year and it has half a million refugees to absorb from the Sudan. In those circumstances, is not our proposal for £500,000 worth of aid for the coming year inadequate, given that the economic recovery plan will cost $2·5 billion?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have given terrific humanitarian assistance to Eritrea—some £12 million worth of aid since January 1992. We are proposing a new bilateral programme of £500,000 worth of assistance a year for that part of the world. With regard to the rehabilitation of displaced persons, the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs will visit Eritrea shortly and make a report. We wish to reserve judgment until we know the outcome of that report before considering any further matters.

Mr. Bowis: Is my hon. Friend aware that the message that I and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) bring back from Eritrea is that the people there are in remarkably good heart after 30 years of war and devastation and now need to face the next 30 years of economic war, which they will win with world support. Will he examine the possibility of supporting the World bank's initiative on its recovery programme, as well as the United Nations Development Programme for returnees and access to the Lomé IV convention, and also see whether Britain can do something to help with the necessary reforms of the civil service, support for the police and especially the improvement in literacy, given that Eritrea has chosen English as its second language?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All those matters will certainly be examined—I can say no more than that to my hon. Friend or the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), both of whom attended the referendum as observers. The British Government warmly welcome the referendum result, wish to help Eritrea in the future and will consider their relationship with Eritrea on a positive basis from now on.

Mr. Battle: I thank the Minister for his warm welcome for the referendum result. It was a privilege to be present at the referendum on 23 and 25 April. It was a free and fair vote that represented liberation of the Eritrean people after 30 years of war. Can the Minister ensure that some substantial bilateral and multilateral aid goes immediately to the reconstruction of the vital port of Massawa, which was devastated by bombing and recently revaged by a rare hurricane? That port is central to movements of food aid and the reconstruction of the whole country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are enormous demands in Eritrea for all sorts of assistance. We are concentrating on the priorities for English language training and agriculture, but we are examining the whole situation.

United Nations Peace Operations

2. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many United Nations peacekeeping or peace monitoring operations the United Kingdom plays a part.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The United Kingdom contributes military personnel to five United Nations peacekeeping operations, including 600 to the force in Cyprus, 15 to the force on the Iraq-Kuwait border, 15 in western Sahara, 122 to the force in Cambodia and 2,500 to the United Nations protection force in former Yugoslavia.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: The House will be impressed by the extent of that list, representing as it does the country's commitment to peacekeeping in the post-cold war period and, above all, the high regard in which British troops are held worldwide. However, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we have reached the point in history at which the whole concept and mechanism of United Nations peacekeeping, and possibly peacemaking, should come under review? In that context, will my right hon. and learned Friend give an assurance that, given Britain's permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council and our reputation and abilities, we will maintain the capability to play a full and prominent part?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to stress the ever-increasing nature of the peacekeeping operations conducted by the United Nations. He is also right to say that British forces should make a significant contribution to those operations. We do so especially in the present operations in Bosnia to convey humanitarian supplies. However, I think that my hon. Friend would also agree that we cannot participate in every peacekeeping mission: we have to determine priorities.

Mr. Rogers: I am sure that the Government, with all of us in the House, view with great concern the decision of the Russians to veto the reform of the United Nations financing of the peacekeeping force in Cyprus. Combined with the withdrawal of the Canadian contribution some

time in June, that will inevitably put an added burden on this country. In view of the present poor state of our defence forces and the Treasury-driven cuts in the "Options for Change" process, will we be able to fulfil those commitments, which are limited at present?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the Russian vote last night. That is a matter which must be considered. But I return to the point that I made. We cannot participate in every peacekeeping force. We have to make choices. Our contribution to peacekeeping forces is recognised as among the most effective made by any member of the United Nations.

Mr. Colvin: If we participate in the number of peacekeeping activities that my right hon. and learned Friend said, that means that there are another 12 in which the United Kingdom is not involved with the United Nations. There are a further eight civil wars going on around the world where the United Nations is not involved and another 25 flashpoints where war could break out at any time, so the role of the United Nations is bound to increase.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) has a good point. The United Nations must convene, deliberate and determine how it will reach agreement on keeping the peace throughout the world and implementing the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Peace", and how it will enforce Security Council resolutions which it passes.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the many parts of the world and operations in which we could make a contribution. That rather emphasises the point that I have already made. One must make choices about where the priorities lie. It is also worth reminding my hon. Friend that, for example, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe can operate in a peacekeeping role, sometimes under the direct authority of the United Nations and sometimes free standing. Therefore, it is a question of making priorities and seeing whether regional organisations can sometimes take some of the strain.

Sir David Steel: Does the Minister accept that the number of forces required for peacekeeping operations would be smaller if they could be deployed in a more timely manner? Does not that underline the importance of the Secretary-General's report "Agenda for Peace", in which he talks about member nations ascribing and allocating forces on a permanent basis to the United Nations? Is that now part of Her Majesty's Government's official policy and, if so, what are the implications for "Options for Change"?

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that sometimes timely action can prevent a more substantial contribution later. There is rather a good example of that in Macedonia where, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, there is now a battalion of United Nations authorised troops in a pre-emptive role. I suspect that over the years we shall see rather more of that.

Hungary

3. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Hungary in the light of his recent visit to Hungary.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I accompanied Her Majesty the Queen on part of her highly successful state visit to Hungary last week. I have had talks with the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. Our relations are in good shape. The Hungarians know that we support their wish to become full members of the European Community when practicable and that meanwhile we are working to make a success of the Community's association agreement with them, particularly by opening the Community's market increasingly to their goods. British investment in Hungary and trade with Hungary are growing and there is scope for plenty more of both. The British know-how fund is an acknowledged success, with many good projects coming forward.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the early accession of Hungary and other states like it to the European Community is at the core of our relations with that country? Can he say when that might be? As the European Parliament's consent is required for the accession of new members to the treaty of Rome, will existing member states be required to give up more power in order to obtain that consent?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that my hon. Friend's second point is very strong. The treaty of Rome provides under article 237 that the Parliament must agree to new accessions. That is not changed under the proposed treaty of Maastricht. Any change in the powers of Parliament is a matter for treaty. But my hon. Friend is right on his first point. Full membership of the Community is one of Hungary's main objectives and we are in favour of its achieving that as soon as practicable. It knows and we know that it is not possible to set an exact date at present.

Dr. Howells: Did the Secretary of State make it clear to the Hungarian Government that the British Government would take a dim view of any encouragement that might be given to the ethnic Hungarians who live in Transylvania and to the secessionist groups that are beginning to surface there?

Mr. Hurd: The Hungarians expressed the view clearly to me that they do not seek a change in the international borders of Romania, but they are understandably anxious that the Hungarians in Transylvania should be given a proper degree of autonomy.

Yugoslavia

4. **Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on achieving a long-term solution to the political problems in the former republic of Yugoslavia.

5. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he assesses to be the most effective in bringing to an end the fighting in Bosnia Herzegovina.

8. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest United Kingdom position over the conflict in former Yugoslavia.

9. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with other United Nations countries regarding the conflict in former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Despite the intransigence of the Bosnian Serbs, we continue to regard the Vance-Owen plan as an indispensable lead into peace in Bosnia. Our policies are directed towards getting the Bosnian Serbs to accept the plan, carry it out in good faith and desist from further attacks. That means increasing the pressure on them by stepping up still further the growing effectiveness of sanctions and testing the declared will of President Milosevic to carry out his intention to cut off supplies to the Bosnian Serbs and allow international monitoring of the border. In case the Bosnian Serbs cannot be persuaded to comply, we are considering with our partners and allies the possibility of using stronger measures, not excluding military options. We also agreed in the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday on the need to express to the Government of Croatia our dismay at recent actions by Bosnian Croats in central Bosnia and around Mostar.

Mr. Ancram: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and welcome the fact that he has not been driven off his sensible dual-track approach by ill-judged insults from certain safely distant American politicians during the past few days. In that context, will my right hon. Friend welcome the constructive statement from the American Government today that deployment of United States ground troops in Macedonia is being considered, particularly as it will give the American public a better appreciation of the complexities of what is happening on the ground throughout the former republic of Yugoslavia?

Mr. Hurd: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. I do not thing that it serves any purpose to start exchanging accusations across the Atlantic. I do not think that some of those remarks would have been made if those concerned had seen the exchanges that have taken place between the allies in recent days, or if they had understood the nature of the effort and the risks which some of us, including Britain, are making in Bosnia at the present time. I agree with my hon. Friend's second point. If the United States were to decide to reinforce the Nordic battalion in Macedonia already referred to, that would be welcome from our point of view.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that it is more than ever important that aggression, wherever it comes from, is not seen to be rewarded? As more and more ground is gained by that aggression, with the loss of Srebrenica and Zepa, it becomes more difficult to secure the peace. Can the Foreign Secretary therefore say what measures he will recommend to the allies to ensure that Gorazde does not suffer the same fate?

Mr. Hurd: The Serbs have not, of course, occupied either Srebrenica or Zepa. In my main answer I dealt, I think, with the hon. Gentleman's point. We believe that so long as the Bosnian Serbs continue to push forward in eastern Bosnia, the pressures against them must be built up. The new element in the last few weeks is the declared intention of President Milosevic to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. That is being partly carried out. It needs to be tested. What we and the Americans have recently agreed, and what is now being carried forward in the Security Council, is that we should propose and agree that there should be monitors along the border between Bosnia and Serbia so as to prevent the flow of illegal traffic.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that there is bound to be much disappointment that the leading western countries have not—so far at least—been able to get their act together in dealing with Serbian aggression and vile ethnic cleansing? As for the Foreign Secretary's reference to Belgrade, is not it a fact that if the Belgrade leadership appears to be—I emphasise "appears to be" —dissociating itself from the Bosnian Serb warlords, it is because of the fear of armed intervention? Should not that lesson be carefully learnt, be it here in western Europe or in the United States?

Mr. Hurd: The allies are agreed on the effort which we are carrying forward. That is to say, the Europeans, the Americans and the Russians are agreed on the need for a political process—I have mentioned the Vance-Owen plan —on the need for effective sanctions, with the Americans and the Europeans working together, and on the need for the humanitarian effort: our troops on the ground, a big United Nations effort and the United States and other air drops. All that is agreed and is going forward. There is consultation on further measures. As for the hon. Gentleman's second point, one can never be sure what moves people to change their policy. It may be the undoubtedly growing effectiveness of sanctions. It may be, as he suggested, the hints of possible military action, which we are not excluding. One cannot be sure. Nor is it certain that the change is a substantial and permanent one. That is what now has to be tested.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Foreign Secretary aware of the perception outside the House of the lowering cloud of shame over the Governments of Europe and America because of the lack of military intervention? That does not include, obviously, the troops we have put there who are giving humanitarian aid. Is the Foreign Secretary aware that at a meeting in this very House the Bosnian Foreign Secretary and the Bosnian UN envoy said that we are keeping their people alive until the Serbs come to kill them? Is not it time to end the delay, to stop buck-passing to the Americans and to commit ourselves to military intervention to deal with ethnic cleansing and create a safe haven now for those Bosnians who are left in their own country?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is the first I have heard in the House, throughout many months of debate, to propose a military intervention on the ground to impose a particular solution. No Government whom I know of, and certainly not the Government of the United States, propose that. The House debated this matter on 29 April. I carried away from that debate the very strong feeling from all parts of the House, although not from all individuals, that hon. Members were in favour of the pressures that we are building up and of the line that we are taking and that they were also in favour of substantial prudence before going into further types of involvement

without calculating the consequences. The kind of phrases that fell from the hon. Gentleman's lips are a little bit easy for those who do not carry the responsibility for the result.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the situation in and around Mostar is becoming increasingly critical? Is he further aware that President Izetbegovic has asked for Mostar to be declared a protected zone? Will he give his support to that request?

Mr. Hurd: I had not heard of that request. The situation in Mostar is serious, but the Spanish troops—the European troops who are escorting humanitarian convoys in that area—have done their best to calm things down. Ceasefires have been negotiated and I believe that there has been some dying away of the fighting, although it comes and goes. We take the matter very seriously and I know that the German Foreign Minister is going to Zagreb. The presidency of the Community, as a result of our meeting on Monday, will express our deep concern to the Croats about the matter, as there is no doubt that the main responsibility is theirs.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I understand my right hon. Friend's reluctance to avoid trading insults across the Atlantic, but is not there support in the Senate, and possibly in the Administration of the President, for arming the Bosnian Muslims? Is it still the Government's view that that would seriously jeopardise the humanitarian relief that we give the Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and others and that were we to agree to such an American request that work would have to be abandoned and other initiatives that have already taken would be jeopardised?

Mr. Hurd: The House discussed this subject on 29 April and the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and other hon. Members supported our reasons for having reservations about this option, not the least of which is the one that my hon. Friend mentioned. It is hard to imagine how the humanitarian effort and the troops escorting the convoys could continue—at least in their present form—if that option were taken. No option has been excluded, because the situation may change, but our position on that particular option has not changed.

Dr. John Cunningham: Is not one of the tragic lessons of the middle east that pouring armaments into areas of instability and conflict does not lead to early political solutions or to peace? Should not we emphasise that point to those who want the United Nations arms embargo on Bosnia to be ended?

Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider what he said a few moments ago about the Croatians? Is not an expression of dismay a slap on the wrist for the Croatians? Should not we take the same attitude to the Croatians as we take to the Bosnian Serbs and is not the time long overdue for the Security Council to make explicit its ultimatum to the Serbs and the Croatians that, if they do not sign the ceasefire and uphold it, limited air strikes will be used against them?

The right hon. Gentleman should support, as he has hitherto, the urgent need to strengthen the United Nations presence in Macedonia and significantly to increase the presence of Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe monitors in Kosovo to make it clear to President Milosevic that we need convincing of his good faith in respect of Kosovo and Macedonia.

Mr. Hurd: I have sketched out again our position on air strikes and the arms embargo, which has not really altered since our debate on 29 April. There was some discussion in the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday about whether we should begin to think of sanctions against Croatia. We reached the conclusion that that was not justified at this stage, but the Croatians should have no doubt that, if the kind of incident that occurred in central Bosnia and has now occurred again in Mostar continues, they cannot expect to have the kind of relationship with the European Community or the international community that they expected.

I have already answered the right hon. Gentleman's point about Macedonia, where a Nordic battalion is in place. If it were strengthened—for example, by an American decision to put ground troops into Macedonia—that would be welcome. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have recognised Macedonia; it is a member of the United Nations and Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance are trying to sort out the detailed implications. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's point about strengthening the CSCE presence in Kosovo.

6. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his European Community counterparts to discuss developments in former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Former Yugoslavia will be discussed at the next General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 8 June.

Sir Michael Neubert: I pay full tribute to the humanitarian contribution made by British forces in Bosnia, but is not the painful reality that it has saved thousands from being starved to death at the price of thousands of others being shelled to death and that Cambodian-type atrocities will continue unless effective deterrent action is taken? Does not relevant 20th century experience tell us that for defending freedom from ruthless aggressors there is no substitute for a strong Anglo-American alliance, compared with which an attempt to secure agreement and joint action among 12 European nations is little more than a mirage?

Mr. Hogg: It is right to be absolutely clear that many thousands of people in Bosnia are now living who would have been dead, but for the delivery of humanitarian supplies over many months, and that much credit for that goes to the British troops now in Bosnia and to the Royal Air Force. We must also recognise that what we face in Bosnia is essentially a civil war. It is true that it has been supported by men and munitions from Serbia and, as has been made plain by many hon. Members, from Croatia too. In essence, however, it is a civil war and we need to reinforce the pressure now on Serbia to get President Milosevic to put yet more pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to subscribe to a peace agreement.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Minister agree that we must learn lessons from the tragedy now occurring in Yugoslavia, one of which is that the precipitate recognition of the new republics by the European Community exacerbated the problems there? Does the Minister further agree that if there is recognition in other parts of Europe in the coming months and years, hand in hand with recognition there must be an agreement

recognising the rights of minorities both within the state with which they reside and in any neighbouring state with which they may have linguistic or other relations?

Mr. Hogg: It is true that the British Government were more cautious about recognising Croatia than were a number of our European colleagues, but by the time we recognised Croatia we all judged that the grounds for refusing recognition no longer existed. The same applied in the case of Bosnia. The hon. Gentleman will keep in mind that there was a referendum, and an independent report commissioned by the EC, in the light of which it would have been difficult to withhold recognition of Bosnia. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about minority rights, and it is certainly true in the context of the entirety of former Yugoslavia that the preservation of minority rights within the frontiers is of key importance to any peace settlement.

Mr. Fry: When my right hon. and learned Friend talks to our European partners, will he point out that although the British people are anxious to play their part in resolving the problems in Bosnia, they would appreciate greater assistance from other members of the Community in terms of sending their forces to be shot at and put into danger? If there is to be a general Community solution to the problem, it should not be left mainly to the British and French forces to carry out the peacekeeping in the name of the European Community. I believe that if that were achieved, my right hon. and learned Friend would find much greater agreement about the way forward, and perhaps rather less resistance to the effective use of British forces.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a point of substance. He was right to pay tribute to the French Government for their very substantial contribution. The Spanish Government, too, have contributed. There are also countries which, by reason of their history or their constitutions, or both, would find it rather difficult to make a contribution in what was Yugoslavia.

On the question of peacekeeping, which is a different matter from what is currently happening in the former Yugoslavia, we look for a substantial contribution from outside the European Community. Naturally, I have in mind the deployment of substantial numbers of ground troops by the United States if a peacekeeping force were organised to underpin an agreement.

South Africa

7. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the South African Government following the murder of Chris Hani; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made every effort to help minimise the effect of the tragic assassination of Chris Hani on the negotiating process in South Africa, including the provision of a senior police officer to help with the investigation.

Miss Lestor: Following the distinguished and dignified address given by Mr. Nelson Mandela during his recent visit to this country, as well as the death of Chris Hani and the revelation of the alleged plots against other people involved in the constitutional process, will the Minister press on Mr. de Klerk and all others the urgent need to secure an early settlement in the constitutional discussions so that the next stage may be reached? Will the Government also make it perfectly clear to Chief Buthelezi that they will provide no support at all for his proposals concerning separatism, which at best would delay the constitutional talks and at worst could create in South Africa the sort of tragedy now engulfing Yugoslavia?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I wholly endorse the hon. Lady's words about Nelson Mandela's visit last week, which was interesting and remarkable to us all. With regard to the constitutional process in South Africa, the hon. Lady will be aware that negotiations reopened on 26 April—a week after Chris Hani's dreadful assassination. The negotiating council has now agreed that a date for the election should be set before June and that the election should be held before the end of April 1994. Substantial progress has been made. The constitutional process is, of course, a matter for and between the various parties in South Africa. That is all that I can say about that aspect of the matter.

Mr. John Carlisle: While my hon. Friend is right to offer the South African Government support for their move towards multiracial democracy, may I ask him to urge on them some caution with regard to the pace of reform? Does he agree that until all parties—including the Inkatha Freedom party and, despite current circumstances, members of the Conservative party—are involved in the decision-making process and the discussions, any move towards an early general election would be fatal for South Africa?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As I have already indicated, the negotiating council has tentatively agreed arrangements for setting a date for a general election in South Africa. Clearly it is for the negotiating council to proceed at such pace as it collectively judges would be wise in all the circumstances facing that country.

Dr. John Cunningham: Was not Nelson Mandela's persistence in calling for peace and reconciliation quite remarkable, and should it not be applauded, especially in the light of the assassination of his colleague Chris Hani and the known assassination threats faced daily by other leading members of the African National Congress? Would it not be beneficial to all parties in South Africa to move quickly to the formation of a transitional executive council, thus allowing all-party supervision of the defence and police forces in South Africa? Would not that, in turn, help to batten down the violence—if not end it, at least in the beginning contain it—and thereby hasten the achievement of non-racial democracy?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments about Mr. Nelson Mandela, whose call for calm and measured reactions in the light of what must be dreadful provocation for so many people in South Africa is greatly to be applauded. The security situation in South Africa is primarily the responsibility of the South African Government, but it behoves all other people of influence to seek to restrain emotions which must be running high. As to the transitional executive council, I agree that its establishment will be beneficial. It will also enable the lifting of all sanctions to take place, as recommended by the ANC.

EC Foreign Policy

10. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to have discussions with his European Community partners concerning the development of common European Community foreign policies.

Mr. Hurd: I meet our European Community partners regularly to discuss the strengthening of intergovernmental co-operation on foreign policy.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this country can exert much more influence in the world when we work in unison with our European Community partners than when we operate on our own? Does he further agree that the Maastricht treaty will greatly facilitate that process and enable this country to exert more influence in the world?

Mr. Hurd: On a good many subjects, what my hon. Friend says is true. The principle on which we operate today, and which will be strengthened in the Maastricht treaty, is that where we can reach common positions we can take joint action. Where we cannot, or where specific national interests are to be pursued, individual member states must be free to do that.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Before the Foreign Secretary meets his European partners, will he take time to study the important report in *Al Wasat* of an interview between President Hafiz Al-Assad of Syria and Patrick Seale? In that interview President Assad recognised publicly for the first time, so far as I can recall, that both Israelis and Palestinians have to live in Palestine, and that the Syrians are for full peace with full withdrawal. He also recognised the growing opinion in Israel for peace. Will the Foreign Secretary recommend to his European partners that they support the statements made by President Assad in that interview?

Mr. Hurd: We have throughout given strong support to the discussions under the peace process. That includes discussions between Israel and Syria, and, of course, Israel and the Palestinians.

Sir Jim Spicer: Does my right hon. Friend accept that while all our attention is naturally directed towards events in Yugoslavia, other wars and civil wars are raging in what was the Soviet Union? Will he give an assurance that there will always be time to discuss those dreadful events and killings, and in particular the awfulness of the war that is developing between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, indeed. It is the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe rather than the European Community which is attempting to provide a political framework for an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and we strongly support that process.

Mr. Grocott: When the Foreign Secretary next meets his European counterparts, will he draw to their attention the important resolution of the European Parliament on 22 April, drawing attention to the tragic position in Angola where, because of the colonial legacy, Europe has a special responsibility? In particular, will he draw attention to the way in which the will of the international community is constantly being flouted by the UNITA forces? Will he take note of the contents of that resolution, which draws attention to the crucial importance of isolating the forces of UNITA from support from outside, particularly from South Africa and Zaire, and of seeing that the United States recognises and supports the Angolan Government, who represent the democratic will of the Angolan people?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure about what the hon. Gentleman says about the colonial legacy—that was some time ago—but I believe that UNITA and Savimbi have lost, and deserved to lose, a good deal of international sympathy for failing to accept the results of the recent election in Angola. There is no alternative to discussion between the MPLA Government and UNITA, and it should be the task of all, particularly those who gave strong support to UNITA, to make sure that those discussions take place and succeed.

Sweden

11. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Swedish Foreign Minister to discuss Sweden's future relationship with the EC.

Mr. Hurd: I met Mrs. Af Uglass on 26 April in Stockholm and the Prime Minister, Mr. Bildt, the following day. I confirmed our strong support for a successful conclusion to Sweden's negotiations now going on to join the Community.

Mr. Spring: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is very much in Britain's interest that the membership of the European Community is enlarged and open to countries that are suitable for membership? Does he agree that the accession of Sweden, a country with which we have many links, will strengthen the EC's economic base and open up further opportunities to Britain in an expanding single market?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, indeed. We look forward warmly to the day when Sweden joins the Community. We want the negotiations with the four applicants—Sweden, Finland, Austria and Norway—to press ahead as soon as possible so that, preferably, they go through all the processes and become full members by 1995.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that before any question of accession by Sweden to the EC, there is the matter of the European Economic Area, and a 550-page treaty, which is now under discussion? Since the Swiss have decided not to go ahead on that for the time being, can the Foreign Secretary tell us about the position of Sweden? Is it not a fact that accession to this treaty would mean considerable economic, commercial and legal obligations for Sweden? Have they been fully understood in Sweden, and would it have to have a referendum before acceding?

Mr. Hurd: The arrangements that have been made between the European Free Trade Area countries since the result of the Swiss referendum on the EEA are freely entered into by Sweden and fully understood by it. So the process of EEA is going forward and, at the same time, negotiations are making progress between Sweden and the European Community on its full accession.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the rapid accession of Sweden and the other EFTA countries to the EC would result in a far more pragmatic and financially advantageous view of the expenditure within the EC?

Mr. Hurd: I think that they would all be net contributors, if that is what my hon. Friend is hinting at. There are wider and more political reasons why we in this country—and, I believe, most of the Community now—would warmly welcome the arrival as full members of the Community of those four countries. They are all well qualified and they would all, as far as we are concerned, be warmly welcomed.

United Nations Peace Operations

12. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the role of the United Nations Organisation as a peacekeeper.

Mr. Hurd: Article 1.1 of the charter of the United Nations states that the purpose of the United Nations is "to maintain international peace and security and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace."

We fully support the United Nations and the Secretary-General in these endeavours.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Secretary of State admit that so far, unfortunately, the record of the United Nations has in no way lived up to what is contained in the charter? Will he accept that, while we are now seeing some improvement in the role of the United Nations, we need the following: first, a very rigorous regime of arms control to try to end the possibilities of the sort of wars that we are seeing all over the world; secondly, a permanent structure to react quickly to events such as those occurring in Yugoslavia, where, because everybody was at sixes and sevens, we have seen a tragedy unfolding before our eyes and have been virtually powerless to do very much that is effective about it?

Mr. Hurd: We are all in favour, and have taken initiatives in making, more transparent and open the criteria for the sale of arms, particularly among the permanent five. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman to live in the real world in which arms, particularly small arms, are plentiful and cheap in almost every country.

We are now seeing disorder within countries. It is not realistic to suppose that, even if the whole international community were united, for example, on what should be the future of Nagorno-Karabakh or the regime in Angola or Somalia, simply by forming a view from outside we will be able to impose solutions on the internal affairs of those countries. We can be more willing to try, not by putting in troops but by making diplomatic efforts to show people ways in which they can live together. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman not to arouse too many hopes in that respect.

At the beginning of 1992 there were 10,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops; at the beginning of 1993 there were 60,000; and when the planned deployments in Mozambique and Somalia happen there will be 100,000 in 12 separate operations. That is the measure of the growth of this problem and of the efforts of the United Nations to deal with it.

Sir Michael Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most important ways of ensuring the peacekeeping process of the United Nations, particularly after a period of civil war, is through the organisation of free and fair elections? In that context, will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to send good wishes to all those who will be involved in the process in Cambodia, including hon. Members and local government officials who, with other international representatives, will be leaving for Cambodia next week?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is quite right. Cambodia is one example where the United Nations has, for the moment, brought most of the fighting to an end and set up a framework in which there can, and should be, relatively free elections later this month. The situation is fragile, however, and my hon. Friend is right that all those concerned need our help and good wishes.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Secretary of State's comment that the situation in Cambodia is fragile. Can he enlighten us as to how far the peacekeeping efforts of United Nations are impeded by the lack of finance from one of its largest participants? Does he accept that in Yugoslavia, where our troops are now changing over, humanitarian efforts were being hindered by those who were seeking to use the convoys bringing in aid for the purpose of supplying munitions? It would be worse if the United Nations were arming the participants there.

Mr. Hurd: It is true that one of the handicaps that the Secretary-General has suffered and draws attention to in his "Agenda for Peace" is financial uncertainty. Unfortunately, both former super-powers have in the past contributed to that uncertainty. I hope that both are removing that uncertainty. That is certainly the intention of President Clinton, but I am not encouraged by the Russian veto in the Security Council yesterday on financing peacekeeping. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's second point: we want to continue the humanitarian effort while it is needed.

Russia

13. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effect on United Kingdom policy of the result of the recent referendum in Russia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have warmly welcomed the outcome of last month's referendum in Russia. Our policy remains one of firm support for the continuation of economic and democratic reforms. This policy has now been endorsed by the Russian electorate.

Mr. Ainsworth: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the sheer scale of the support shown by the Russian people for Boris Yeltsin and the programme of reforms gives a tremendous boost to international confidence in the long-term future of Russia? Does he also agree that in the near term substantial aid will be necessary to help the difficult process of economic transformation? Will he therefore comment on the quantity and quality of Britain's aid to Russia?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. He will know that last month my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced a doubling of United Kingdom direct bilateral

grant aid, together with a doubling of Export Credits Guarantee Department cover. Our total commitment to Russia is of the order of $1·7 billion. Referring to the quality of the aid, the United Kingdom's know-how fund is second to nor : as a mechanism for the delivery of technical know-how.

Mr. Cryer: If the Minister welcomes a referendum in Russia to clarify the position, why does he not take the same view of a referendum in the United Kingdom on the Maastricht treaty? It would clarify the position, and involve the people of the United Kingdom in determining whether to go ahead with this wretched treaty or reject it. If the people of Russia can have a democratic vote, why not the people of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hogg: I have always known that the hon. Gentleman has a personality difficulty when it comes to judging things in relation to other things. He obviously equates the congress in Russia, which was elected under the Gorbachev regime, with this place. I do not, and I am sorry that he does.

BBC World Service

14. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the BBC World Service.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World Service is an institution of great influence and prestige throughout the world. The substantial real increase in resources that we have provided, and are providing again this financial year, has enabled it to improve audibility, expand output and enhance programme quality.

Mr. Bates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer, and for reaffirming the Government's priority in maintaining the strength and position of the BBC World Service as the leading international broadcaster. Does my hon. Friend agree that in times of international conflict and uncertainty the need for an independent and unbiased news service around the world is greater than ever? Does he further agree that this can sometimes be best achieved by placing special emphasis on developing new language services so that the programmes broadcast become more widely accessible to the people whom they seek to serve?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend about the leading role that the World Service plays in the world of international broadcasting and its tremendous achievements. It is due to Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognition of those achievements, which have been followed by substantial assistance and funding that the World Service has been able to do so well in recent years. In the past three year funding period, for example, broadcasts were increased by more than 10 per cent. and two new languages in areas of tension—Ukrainian and Albanian—were introduced.

Mr. George Robertson: Is the Minister aware that his views on the World Service, and those of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), are shared throughout the House? The service is held in the highest esteem throughout the globe, not just in terms of the quality of its broadcasting but in terms of its reliability. It is widely regarded as the most reliable broadcasting service on the planet. Does the Minister recognise that there is genuine concern about the future funding of the World Service, given that it has been warned that it may well face substantial cuts in the Treasury spending blitz that is ahead of us? If it were to share in those cuts and its service were cut back, that would be not just a disgrace but hugely counterproductive to Britain's national interest.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am fully aware of the widespread acclaim for the World Service in all parts of the House and I emphasise that the funding increase for the World Service from the Foreign Office budget over the past 10 years or so has been 40 per cent. in real terms. This year, the increase has been £10 million, which is way above the rate of inflation. What has happened—this is what the hon. Gentleman is referring to—is that the Foreign Office has been in touch with the World Service and said that, depending on the outcome of the public expenditure survey, we shall have to have discussions and if the Foreign Office is unable to meet the aspirations of the World Service, its funding will be put on the same footing as the rest of the Foreign Office budget when it comes to reviewing expenditure.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, on a previous occasion when the Treasury required economies to be made in the foreign service budget, one of the economies made was to close down Spanish broadcasts to Latin America a few weeks before the Argentines invaded the Falkland Islands? Will he make absolutely certain that this immensely valuable institution, which does more for British influence and prestige throughout the world than probably any other activity of the Foreign Office, is protected from the next round of economy cuts?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to receive the message of my hon. Friend in the spirit of support for the World Service. I do not believe that there are any cuts in prospect in terms of languages from the World Service. My hon. Friend has referred to an earlier occasion when there were threats; it is since then that the World Service has expanded in such a tremendous way.

Swan Hunter

3.30 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice)*: To ask the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on what help he will offer Tyneside in the wake of the loss of the naval contract by Swan Hunter.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Government deeply regret that Swan Hunter has been unable to secure orders, including that for the new helicopter carrier for the Ministry of Defence. We are well aware of the potential loss of jobs both at the yard and among suppliers. The company will need to take decisions in the light of the failure to win orders and these decisions are likely to involve early job losses.

In the event of substantial job losses, the Government are considering a number of measures to help the area. We would intend to designate a new enterprise zone in the area and will urgently examine possible sites. This would be subject to European Commission agreement. English Estates would implement an important £2·5 million industrial development at Walker Riverside in conjunction with the city council and Tyne and Wear development corporation. The Tyneside training and enterprise council and employment service locally would offer an enhanced range of labour market help to those affected by the closures.

In addition, I can confirm now, ahead of the results of the assisted area map review, that both Newcastle and south Tyneside travel-to-work areas will retain their development area status, subject to agreement with the European Commission. Availability of regional selective assistance will be important in attracting new investment and new jobs. We are putting into immediate effect the Tyneside TEC plan for dealing with the closure of Westoe colliery, which is designed to help the whole area and not just those leaving the colliery. A further £2 million will be available to Tyne and Wear development corporation from the additional £20 million recently made available for coal regeneration measures for increased provision of new industrial sites in the area.

The area already benefits from support from many regional and urban schemes. The Government will be examining urgently how priorities can be focused within these schemes to help the area. I have asked my Department's regional director in the north-east, with colleagues from the Departments of the Environment and Employment, to co-ordinate all those concerned locally with regional regeneration to advise on how they can target resources most effectively to have an early impact in attracting new employment.

We do not in any way underestimate the importance that shipbuilding and Swan Hunter in particular have had for Tyneside. I hope that all concerned will co-operate to build on the measures that I have announced today.

Mr. Cook: Will the Minister confirm that last November he was warned by the constituency Members that Swan Hunter would be at risk of closure if it lost the naval contract? Are we to understand from the measures that he has just announced that the Government have not a single proposal to try to keep open the last remaining shipbuilding yard on Tyneside? Does he appreciate that, if they intend to do anything to save the yard, the situation is now urgent, and that even as we discuss the matter the directors of the company are meeting the bankers? Surely the Government can announce something that they will do to continue shipbuilding at this yard, a yard which has already secured two export orders which could be lost if it were to close?

Does not the crisis at Swan Hunter provide a clear example of why we must plan ahead for conversion of defence industries that are losing defence orders?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Swan Hunter cannot get help from the European intervention fund to diversify because the Government agreed at the time of privatisation that British warship yards would be excluded? Will he return to Brussels and get that changed after today?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that every part of the yard we are discussing is within the boundary of an urban development corporation which is appointed by the Government and accountable to the Government? What extra resources will it receive to cope with any extra need?

In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's statement about enterprise zones, will he give us an undertaking that, if Swan Hunter falls, the Government's own urban development corporation will use its planning powers to stop those high-tech facilities in the yard being demolished to make way for service industries, for warehousing or for supermarkets? Will it then try to find another operator to bring work to one of the most modern shipyards in Europe, with some of the most skilled people in Europe?

Already in the shipbuilding yards on both banks of the Tyne one in three men is out of work. If Swan Hunter closes, one in two could be on the dole. It is not just Tyneside, but the nation, that will have its eyes on the Government to see whether they can rise to the gravity of the crisis and match it now with help on the same scale as the blow they have just delivered to the local community.

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked a number of questions. Underlying many of those questions appeared to be an attitude that belittled the achievements of enterprise zones and of urban development corportions. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation has already created 10,000 jobs. Is he not aware of the success of other enterprise zones in job creation? Is he suggesting that Tyneside should spurn those offers of help? That seemed to be underlying what he said.

The second thing that seemed to underlie the hon. Gentleman's questions was the suggestion that the yard should stay open regardless of the market for its products. If that is his attitude, I fear he must be the only person in the House who is not aware of the excess capacity in shipbuilding and, in particular, in warship building. I wonder why he does not recognise the advantage to that area of a transition from excessive dependence upon the old industries of coal, shipbuilding and steel to a more diversified economy, with vehicles, pharmaceuticals and electronics providing employment that will last and provide opportunities in the future.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): My right hon. Friend must be well aware that the announcement that Swans has lost by a very large margin is a cruel blow for Tyneside. We welcome the steps taken today, but it is absolutely essential

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

that the local initiative that will come from Tyneside, the local effort, be matched on a sustained basis by national Government. *[Interruption.]*

May we have a promise that every Government— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must desist.

Mr. Trotter: May we have a commitment that every Government Department and agency will have its resources harnessed to this task?

Will my right hon. Friend pay an early visit to Tyneside to hear of the problem for himself? Does he agree that we have on Tyneside a very valuable asset in the labour force at Swan Hunter, who are highly trained, very skilled, hard working and flexible? Is not that an attraction for new industry?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to confirm what my hon. Friend said about the skill of the work force and, even more importantly, about the commitment of the people of Tyneside to build on the opportunities that they are given through the measures that I have announced and through the programmes that are already in place there. They have the opportunity to build a more diversified and prosperous industrial future for a region with a very great past in industries that, sadly, are now fading.

I am also happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that I shall make early arrangements to visit the region this month.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does not the Minister realise that all the measures, many of which we have already, are not enough even to replace the mining jobs that we are losing in the north-east, let alone to replace the jobs of all the skilled shipyard workers who will be put out of work as a result of a devastating decision for Tyneside? Does not the Minister also realise that the most useful thing that he could do would be to tell the Secretary of State for Defence to bring forward orders for type 23 frigates now so that there would be some shipbuilding work for the yard?

As a Minister whose Department is responsible for monopoly policy, will the right hon. Gentleman investigate and ascertain whether the order that was placed was in any way subsidised by the profits from the Trident contract? If that were so, it would mean that a monopoly supplier was buying its way into another monopoly.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am assured that there is no question of underbidding. The price tendered by the successful bidder was broadly in line with the expectations of the Ministry of Defence. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman recognises that, if the order had gone the other way, it would have been very bad news for two other areas of the United Kingdom.

I find it rather surprising that the right hon. Gentleman, who is a member of a party that has on a number of occasions and in a number of documents called for more substantial and earlier reductions in defence expenditure, now seems to be calling on the Ministry of Defence to order ships for which it has no immediate requirement.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I welcome the package of measures that my right hon. Friend has announced today, although I am bound to say that the House and my constituents who work in the Swan Hunter yard would have preferred to celebrate today the placing of the order for ships with that yard. We await fuller details of the tender so that we can be satisfied that like was compared with like in awarding the contract.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the work force and the management of Swan Hunter on their valiant efforts in the past months? They have done their utmost to secure the order—sadly, only to fall at the last fence.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in that and to recognise the skills and commitment of the work force. We all wish to see those skills and that work force find job opportunities, if not in that yard then elsewhere, and we wish them to build on what I have announced and on the schemes already in place.

The tender, of course, is a matter primarily for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. I am assured that the tender was awarded on a like-for-like basis and that it was genuinely won with a substantial price difference by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. and its partner Kvaerner.

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): Tyneside does not want ministerial day-trippers; it wants positive action from the Government. The sense of despair and disappointment felt yesterday on Tyneside as a result of the announcement will turn today to anger and a sense of betrayal as a result of the Minister's complacent statement. The Government stand condemned for doing nothing to help the thousands of workers who depend on Swan Hunter.

Is the Minister aware that there is a widely held view that the announcement to award the hull to the Clyde, which would mean thousands of Tyneside jobs being sacrificed, was rushed forward to yesterday so that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could take some good news to the Scottish Tory party conference which starts today in Edinburgh? Will the Government, even at this late stage, take positive steps to preserve and protect shipbuilding at Swan Hunter, or will they simply do nothing and stand to one side to witness the end of shipbuilding on the Tyne?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will realise that his suggestion is unworthy of him. The Labour Front Bench has been pressing for the decision on this order to be brought forward.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend understand that all those with roots in the north of England warmly support the measures that he has announced today and those measures that the Government have already announced and implemented to help that part of the country? Does he also understand that, while there is quiet satisfaction and pleasure in and around Barrow, the order which has been placed on the basis of technical excellence and value for money will help that part of Cumbria where many of my constituents work? There are massive and continuing problems in Barrow as a result of the end of the cold war and the collapse of communism and the rundown in submarine building. My right hon. Friend will need to pay attention to the continuing problems in Barrow in the months ahead.

Mr. Sainsbury: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome—and, indeed, that of other hon. Members—for

the measures that I have announced. They will bring further practical help and job creation opportunities to the region.

My right hon. Friend is right about what he said about Barrow. I am well aware of the difficulties there, both by reason of the peripherality of the area and the rundown of jobs in the Trident building programme. I know how welcome yesterday's announcement will be in Barrow and, indeed, on the Clyde.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The Minister has just lectured the House on the recognition of achievement. Perhaps he will tell us where, in his announcement today, there is a recognition of the achievements of the directors and work force of Swan Hunter shipyard since privatisation in 1986. He supported that privatisation. How have the people of Tyneside been rewarded for all their work?

Many of the things that my constituents would like me to say to the Minister would not be allowed in the House, so I simply ask him a question that the whole of Tyneside wants to be asked: is it the Government's intention that Swan Hunter should remain in existence as a shipyard? If so, what orders will go into that yard? Orders will need to be committed by the end of the week or the yard will go into receivership.

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that there is no hon. Member who does not recognise the difficulties, the regrets and, indeed, the sorrow and bitterness that may be felt because of the long history of shipbuilding on the Tyne, especially by Swan Hunter. We owe it to the work force and management of Swan Hunter to be practical and realistic. There is excess capacity in warship building. We all know the reasons why there is a cut in defence orders not simply in the United Kingdom but worldwide. We would not be helping that management or work force if we were to suggest that orders could be conjured out of nowhere. The measures that I have announced today will provide practical help to an area which has suffered a severe blow.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that the House has heard many sad stories about yards that did not get defence orders. There was always a three or four-corner argument on who should get the latest frigate order, and so on. My firm of Vosper Thornycroft, in Southampton, which is privatised, has made great efforts. The opportunities that my right hon. Friend is showing today to this area could be something for the future because Vosper Thornycroft, after going worldwide to get orders and doing everything that it could to cut back its work force and ensure that it had a substantial order book, now valued at about £700 million, could be an example to Swan Hunter. I am sure that, with my right hon. Friend's help, this will not be a disaster story but something for the future.

Mr. Sainsbury: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating Vosper's shipyard in his area on its success in building up a substantial export order book. It is another privatised yard that is expanding and taking on staff. As my hon. Friend recalled, it is inevitable that, when there are orders to be placed, the Ministry of Defence, on behalf of the taxpayer, should seek value for money. Seeking value for money inevitably means on occasion that there are losers of orders as well as winners. That is the inevitable result. It is obviously a matter of great regret for those who lose, but it is not realistic to suggest that one should simply place twice as many orders so that there are no losers.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Is the Minister aware that, far from the impression that he gave of an outdated industry, Swan Hunter is one of the most modern facilities in the world? Is he further aware that, during the term of office of the Government, companies such as Plessey and Marconi—companies at the forefront of technology—have also closed facilities at Tyneside? Having destroyed our mining industry, now destroyed our shipbuilding industry, decimated our manufacturing industry and undermined our local democracy, can he explain to the people of Tyneside, particularly in Tynemouth, why any of them should ever contemplate voting Tory again?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman would do his constituents and British industry a better service if he recognised its achievements, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) did, in winning record export orders, record manufacturing output and unsurpassed increases in manufacturing productivity.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In view of the strategic implications of losing a shipyard, will my hon. Friend discuss with the Secretary of State for Defence what scope there might be within the Royal Navy for ordering ships of a lesser specification? I am thinking particularly of those ships which are badly needed to replace our amphibious warfare ships, which are essentially ships which transport rather than fight. It would be possible to design ships which would serve their purpose with the lower specification and would serve the purpose of creating orders which are badly needed in British shipyards.

Mr. Sainsbury: I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will both have noted what my hon. Friend said. I refer him to what my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) said last week, but I can also confirm that the order that has been placed for the helicopter carrier is by no means for a ship that is gold-plated. It will be a practical vessel which will meet the requirements of the Navy for the task that it has been given.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Does the Minister understand that the great sense of anger among workers in the shipyard community and the whole of Newcastle is born out of a sense of betrayal? The Government have told workers that they believe in an industrial policy, yet it is clear that a decision has been made on defence procurement which does no more than set one industrial area against another, without regard to the regeneration of two industrial communities in the north.

Is it not time that there was much closer liaison between the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry? Is it not also time that a more long-term approach was taken to defence procurement? Does the Minister accept that an urban development corporation is wholly inadequate to deal with a situation in which 3,000 direct jobs and 6,000 or 7,000 indirect jobs are at risk? Does he not believe, as his boss used to believe, in the need for a strategic economic development body on Tyneside?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is the closest possible co-operation between my Department and the Ministry of Defence. The wider issues to which he referred were fully taken into account. But surely he can recognise that we were ordering not two helicopter carriers but one, and that one yard or the other, sadly, had to be the loser.

As I said earlier, I am sure that we can all appreciate the feelings of those on the losing side, but we must be realistic. That is why I have announced a package of measures that can be taken and are being taken by the Government which will genuinely help to attract employment and provide better training and relocation opportunities to the work force of Swan Hunter.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Would the order have been available to either yard if we had initiated the cuts in the defence budget advocated by either of the Opposition parties?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes, clearly and simply, an effective point. If the Opposition parties' proposals on defence expenditure had been followed, there would have been no order for either yard.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Does the Minister accept that his announcement today, which means the virtual closure of Swan Hunter, is a sad occasion for someone like me who served his apprenticeship as a marine fitter in that shipyard? Is he aware that, when I entered the House in March 1974 after handing in my notice at the Hawthorn Leslie shipyard, there were six yards on Tyneside building ships—the Walker naval yard, the Swan Neptune yard, Hawthorn Leslie, Clelands of Wallsend and Redheads of South Shields, as well as Swans. All the yards that I have named have closed during the past few years. The Tory Government have stood back and done nothing, while thousands of skilled shipyard workers have been thrown on the dole queue.

Is it not time that the Minister accepted that it is in Britain's national interest to retain shipbuilding on Tyneside where some of the finest ships that have ever sailed the seven seas have been built? Is not it incumbent upon him and his Government to provide work and orders to maintain shipbuilding on Tyneside?

Mr. Sainsbury: We all appreciate that the failure to win the order was a bitter blow not just to persons such as the hon. Gentlemen who are involved with that shipbuilding area but to those working at the yard and those who have worked at the yard and their families. But it is surely impractical and unrealistic to suggest that we should conjure up orders for warships which the Ministry of Defence does not want in order to keep warship building going when there is excess capacity for warship building.

Is not the hon. Gentleman aware of the scale of the reductions in shipbuilding, both merchant and warship, not just in Britain but throughout Europe and the rest of the world? There is no point in trying to prop up a yard to build ships for which there are no orders. There is point in doing what the Government have announced today, which is to provide better opportunities for attracting employment and training for the work force.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is sad for Tynesiders that the decision has gone against them, but the fact remains that had the decision gone the other way the job implications on Clydeside, and particularly in Barrow, were likely to be even worse because of the geographical nature of that area? Does he further agree that the way in which the tender was set out and won by VSEL clearly demonstrates the good value for money that the taxpayer is getting from this method of providing warships for the Royal Navy?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes an important point about value for money for our defence expenditure. I fear that he is right to draw attention to the fact that, if my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement had awarded the contract to Swan Hunter, I might have been hearing much the same comments that I have heard today but from a different group of Members. That brings us back to the fact that there is not a need for two ships, but two yards were bidding and one had to be a loser.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Is the Minister aware that in the past three or four months 5,000 jobs have gone in the mining industry, that after last night's decision on fishing thousands of fishing jobs will go, and that thousands upon thousands of jobs will be lost on the closure of Swan Hunter? When will the Minister realise that he is not setting up enterprises in the north-east but closing them down? Where shall we find enterprises that will put 10,000 people back to work? When will the Minister get off his backside and get something done in the north-east?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will pay tribute to the excellent work that has been done by all those——

Mr. Campbell: What about the miners, the fishermen and the shipyard workers?

Mr. Sainsbury: If the hon. Gentleman will pause for a moment, I was saying that I hope that he will recognise the excellent work that has been done by all those people on Tyneside in the local authorities, by business men in the chamber of commerce, and by the training and enterprise council. In the urban development corporation, 10,000 jobs have been created, jobs have been created in the enterprise agencies and we have achieved success in the measures that we have taken in Sunderland. Let us look forward and try to build on the industries of the future, not try to prop up the past.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): I have never heard a Minister so complacent in all my time in the House. I am sure that the House will regret the fact that a great shipbuilding industry is going, not temporarily but for good, and when there is a dire need for the British merchant fleet to be modernised and replaced. When we lose the capacity for building ships at Swan Hunter on Tyneside, any orders will go to foreign countries, to our competitors.

The Minister's talk about enterprise zones is slightly flawed and hollow. Swan Hunter has the ability to make good quality ships that our merchant fleet could use, and we should be using it.

Mr. Sainsbury: Again, I have to say that, if we are to provide practical help, we must recognise that there is a great excess capacity of shipbuilding in the world, not just warship building but merchant ship building. To be realistic, it was most unlikely that Swan Hunter would be able to win merchant ship orders against the competition

that is around, even were there such orders waiting to be placed. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman knows that there are no such orders. That is why I emphasise again that the measures that we have announced are devoted to attracting new industries and to providing premises for those new industries, which will create employment in the vehicle, pharmaceutical and electronics industries, for which there is a promising future and where great success has already been achieved on Tyneside.

Scottish Water Services

4 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw to your attention Government press briefings and press reports of a major policy statement about the privatisation of Scottish water services that is being made in Edinburgh today? Will you repeat your view that Government policy statements should be made in this House, especially when they concern services that affect every family in Scotland and more that 6,000 jobs?

Madam Speaker: If a statement of the nature of which the hon. Gentleman speaks has been made, of course I deprecate it. I am always anxious that information should be made available to this House in the first instance. As the hon. Gentleman says, it seems at present to be speculation. He should really have the facts before he raises such a point of order with me.

Mr. Welsh: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have the press release here, which is headed.

"Tories' Water U-turn—Sell-off Plan Dumped."

It quotes a speech by a Government——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not arguing with the hon. Gentleman, but what he is holding up appears to be a press report, not a press release.

Voluntary Personal Security Cards

4.1 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the introduction of a system of voluntary personal security cards; and for connected purposes.

Every Member of Parliament already enjoys the protection of his own personal security card. I hope that that principle can be extended throughout the country. There is much talk at the moment in all quarters about the fact that the Government should listen to what people are saying. I have no doubt in my mind that the Government are doing that already, but I do not believe that it is either good or sensible government automatically to develop policy, regardless of whether or not there is a strong belief in what people are saying. After all, Governments are elected on the basis of legislative proposals and a set of deeply held beliefs. I hope that on this occasion the Government will listen carefully to what both I and other law-abiding citizens are saying on this issue. If the Government agree, I very much hope that they will support the scheme.

One of the planks of the party to which I have always belonged is free choice, but that has never meant the freedom to choose which law to obey and which law to break. Both I, and many other citizens of this country, are appalled by the general level of criminality. The laws that we make in this place must be obeyed, but at the moment it seems to me, and to many other people, that the civil liberties of law-abiding citizens are fast being eroded. Even now, over 90 per cent. of the population are law-abiding. The country is therefore crying out for action to halt the millions of crimes that are being committed, which are costing the country an enormous amount of money.

Nothing, and no one, forces a person to break the law. It is very much a matter of individual responsibility or, should I say, lack of responsibility. That is why I believe that people should be allowed voluntarily to obtain a personal security card.

The Bill accepts in essence the recommendation that the Home Affairs Select Committee made in July 1990, when such a voluntary scheme was recommended to the Home Office. I am well aware of the arguments that are advanced against a compulsory scheme and I understand entirely the outrage that there would be if a law was passed, for instance, to make it an offence not to carry such a card. However, many parts of our lives in modern society require us to prove identity, so what could be more attractive to citizens than for them to take full advantage of the technology that is now available and to obtain voluntarily a personal security card?

The card could be used, for instance, to satisfy shopkeepers about identity when cashing cheques, or by landlords when querying drinkers' ages. It could be used for banking purposes or for recording information about organ donor status. It could also be used as a voluntary identification document to facilitate travel within the European Community and could become a model for a Community-wide card.

I have no doubt that a voluntary personal security card would help to combat fraud, illegal immigration and terrorism. The police would not have the powers to demand production of the card, and the concerns that have been expressed about oppressive demands on minorities would not, I believe, arise. Nevertheless, when people are stopped by enforcement authorities for various reasons, they might see the advantage of holding a card to prove their identity.

Proper safeguards would be necessary to ensure data privacy and the Data Protection Registrar, the many other agencies and the associated authorities would need to be involved in the process. Citizens would have the right to have independent access to data contained on their cards and to challenge its accuracy.

I have complete confidence that many companies throughout the United Kingdom have the skill and sufficient technological imagination to produce a machine-readable security card at a very reasonable cost and I am sure that people would not mind purchasing them for a small price. My goodness, the general public pay enough money through the public purse to try to control the level of criminality.

Like the Home Affairs Select Committee, I believe that personal security cards, which use modern technology to incorporate information about the holder, could be a positive enhancement of liberty. Nothing could be more invasive than the exposure of someone's private credit card transactions, yet it has never been suggested on civil liberty grounds that we should abolish credit cards as a result of the exposure of people's lending limits.

British citizens are already well used to carrying cards and to identifying themselves before cashing cheques or borrowing library books, let alone crossing national boundaries. One card—a smart card—which allowed all that to be done and which contained data on the holder's medical records in case of emergency and for banking purposes would be of enormous benefit.

I believe that now is precisely the time to react positively to the widespread and deeply felt concern among the general public about the level of criminality. The voluntary scheme that I am proposing has many benefits for the individual and for the state. I am not aware of any objection to the principles and laws behind registering someone's birth or death. Why, then, can we not allow the period between those two points to be clearly identified? I hope that the Bill will start the necessary process towards the implementation of a scheme that could be another weapon in the serious war against crime in which we all, as citizens, have a part to play.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Amess, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. James Hill, Lady Olga Maitland, Dame Jill Knight, Sir John Hunt, Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, Mrs. Angela Knight, Mr. Ralph Howell and Sir John Wheeler.

Voluntary Personal Security Cards

Mr. David Amess accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the introduction of a system of voluntary personal security cards; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 2 July, and to be printed. [Bill 196.]

Orders of the Day

Finance (No. 2) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 11 May]
[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Clause 52

PERSONAL AND MARRIED COUPLE'S ALLOWANCES

4.11 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move amendment No. 48, in clause 52, page 30, line 34, leave out 'sections 257 and' and insert 'Section'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient also to discuss the following amendments:

No. 49, in page 30, line 34, leave out 'personal and'.

No. 50, in page 30, line 35, leave out 'allowances' and insert 'allowance'.

No. 51, in page 30, line 35, leave out 'amounts' and insert 'amount'.

No. 12, in page 30, line 37, after '1993-94', insert 'in respect of the married couple's allowance only'.

No. 52, in page 30, line 38, after '1993-94', insert 'so far as relates to section 257A of that Act.'.

No. 13, in page 30, line 38, at end add 'in respect of the married couple's allowance only'.

Mr. Brown: The amendments tabled by the Labour party would have the same effect as those tabled by the Liberal Democrats—although I see that no Liberal Democrat is here to speak to those, so it would probably be for the convenience of the Committee if I spoke to their amendments as well as ours. Fortunately, the amendments have been grouped together.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Where are they?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who I understand will not be with us in the Standing Committee—that is a source of enormous regret to the Opposition—asks me to explain where the representative of the Liberal Democrats is. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has just entered the Chamber, I can say, "There he is," or, "He is there, he is there," as the Prime Minister would point out in that inimitable style that he has made his own.

The other inimitable element of style that the Prime Minister has made his own is, of course, concealed tax increases, which we are discussing today. In case anybody has overlooked it—I am sure that no one in the Chamber has—I must explain that what is before the House is a massive increase, but a back-door increase, in direct taxation. *[Interruption.]* The Financial Secretary to the Treasury giggles at that idea. I do not know whether he giggles nervously or out of sheer physical exhaustion; after all, he has had to deal with the Maastricht legislation as well as with the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

I should be a great deal more sympathetic to the Government's concealed tax increases if some of them were being spent on procuring the landing platform helicopter vessel from Swan Hunter. I understand that the Treasury is taking the credit for the fact that the order has gone to Barrow-in-Furness rather than to Swan Hunter. If that is an opening shot in the negotiations, it is not a worthy one.

The tax increases before us are of substantial significance. The changes that the Budget invites us to make in personal allowances are designed, as the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) will be well aware, to bring in an extra £2·5 billion for the Exchequer in 1994-95 and an extra £2·7 billion in the following year. Those are substantial sums.

That Tory trick has been tried before. In 1981, the then Chancellor froze all the allowances and gained an extra £2 billion. What I think will anger the electorate—last week's election results show the extent of public anger with the Conservative party—is not just the breaking of pre-election pledges about tax increases but also the sneaky way in which the Chancellor has gone about the increases. It is clear that Treasury files have been scoured for tried and tested ways of raising taxes that at least the Chancellor hopes the taxpayers will not notice. Clearly, however, they have noticed.

Let us take the obvious example. Although an increase of a penny in the pound in income tax would have been more progressive than a 1 per cent. increase in employees' national insurance contributions, the Chancellor chose the latter. This is not because such a move provides more help for the poor—obviously it does not—but because the Chancellor clearly believes that it does not look so much like a tax increase.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: When I finish this point, I shall of course give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is a firm favourite of mine and of other Labour Front-Bench Treasury spokespersons.

Exactly the same sort of thinking as that to which I have just referred applies to the extension of valued added tax to domestic fuel and charities. It is pretty clear that the electorate have seen through these devices and are even more angered at the attempted deceit than at the tax increases themselves. What the Treasury team has given us are the methods of Arthur Daley, used by those who clearly regard Alan B'Stard as a role model.

I give way to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), without the obvious implication.

Mr. Smith: I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows that the principal reason for increasing national insurance contributions is that the national insurance fund is now in substantial deficit. Indeed, it will still be in substantial deficit after the increase. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman supports the contributory principle on which it is based. Contributions must be increased when outward payments are rising.

Mr. Brown: It would have been more helpful if the hon. Gentleman had reminded us which party had scrapped the Treasury's contribution to the national insurance fund. If his case is based on hypothecation, why, a few years ago, did not the Government think that that was a very strong argument? The Standing Committee will miss the hon. Gentleman, as he brings to the arguments a quality that one does not necessarily find in all his hon. Colleagues. In making that comment, I do not intend to cast aspersions.

I should like to move on to the real topic of this debate—not just tax rises, but sneaky tax rises. Taken together,

[Mr. Brown]

the Government's changes in allowances and the change to the lower rate band, which, in fairness, has also to be considered, will result in a net gain to the Exchequer of £2·7 billion by 1995-96. Of course this is significant. We should discuss the lower rate band as a reform, as a means of giving back to taxpayers more of their own money, alongside the freezing of the personal allowances, which is a means of taking from taxpayers more of their own money.

Let me state the brutal arithmetic. In 1995-96, the Chancellor will gain about £96 million from freezing all the personal tax thresholds, and another £1,170 million through further restriction of the married couple's allowance. On the last point, hon. Members will recall how thoroughly the Labour party was denounced during the 1987 general election campaign for proposing to do something similar. The present Prime Minister denounced our proposals, and then adopted them. To offset the substantial inflows to the Exchequer that I have just described, it is right to consider the cost of about £850 million to which it is said the lower rate band will give rise in the same financial year. That money goes back to the taxpayer.

However, the changes to mortgage tax relief gain an extra £870 million for the Exchequer. Here again, the Chancellor probably hopes that people will not notice or will not mind so much, as mortgage interest rates have come down following his spectacular policy of leaving the ERM and reducing interest rates. However, long-term interest rates are rising, and are certainly higher than short-term rates. We all know what that probably means for the future, although I am not sure that I agree with the Chancellor that letters to him urging rises in interest rates are a lead indicator.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): As one of the more sensible members of his party, does not the hon. Gentleman think that it is sensible for the Government to raise revenue to reduce a deficit which has been caused by a recession, not just in the United Kingdom, but worldwide? As he has raised the issue of the long-term rate of interest, surely he recognises that, by reducing the deficit, we will secure a better future, with a reduced long-term rate of interest. Does he not feel, in the national interest, that raising additional revenue in that way is good?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman certainly knows how to launch a wounding attack. Being described as one of the more sensible members of the Opposition Front Bench by the hon. Gentleman is designed to do me enormous damage on Tyneside, or at least among those who follow the debates in Committee on the Finance Bill.

The hon. Gentleman has obviously been following my speeches, including my reply to the Second Reading debate and my earlier speech on economic affairs, when I drew attention to the deficit and to the dangers inherent in it. The deficit is a problem. It would be a problem for us in government, as it is for the Government, but let us not forget how it came about. It was the Government who said before the general election that it was safe to reduce taxes and who say that recovery is happening, but yet have had to reduce, rather than increase, their growth forecasts.

Above all, it was the Government who in 1988 said that it was right to cut the top rate of income tax. The Labour party voted against that, after a huge fight about it during the passage of the legislation that year. I think that the hon. Gentleman served on the Standing Committee, so he will recall the events with some affection. It would be better if he showed sorrow and repentance, although those emotions and characteristics are not normally associated with him.

Moving to the Chancellor's tax hike, obviously he thinks that he can slip through this substantial tax increase —clearly that is what it is—without people noticing or objecting. He has allied to the changes on mortgage tax relief changes to car tax allowances, which will bring in an extra £370 million in 1995-96, and changes to the tax treatment of relocation expenses, which we will examine in detail in Committee, which will bring in an extra £206 million, not an insignificant amount.

When we add the gains from freezing all the tax thresholds and eroding personal allowances, and deduct the much smaller cost of the lower rate band, we arrive at a net gain to the Exchequer for the financial year 1995-96 of £2·7 billion. Expressed as a proportion of all revenues for the Government, that is an increase of 4 per cent. It is significant because of the way it is constructed. Particularly seriously for the Opposition, it is significant because it is also regressive.

The very poorest are not affected. One fifth of all adults do not pay income tax, even at the 20 per cent. rate, because they are too poor. They way to target help on the poorest is not through the tax system but through the social security system. However, I suspect that the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary were even less receptive to that point than usual when they came to construct this year's Budget. Of course, on past form it is not a point that one would expect the Secretary of State for Social Security to have raised or pressed with them.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, in its green budget for this year, draws attention to the gains and losses from restricting allowances and from expanding the reduced rate band. For its calculation, it used a figure of £1,000 rather than the Chancellor's £500—the broad flow gives a similar distributional effect. The institute's work shows that the very poorest are not affected, because they are too poor to be affected by any change in the construction of the tax allowance system. The next poorest—those in the third, fourth and fifth deciles, who have below ordinary or medium means—are adversely affected by the change. People in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth gain slightly from the change, and the wealthiest 10 per cent. are also slightly adversely affected because they come into a higher rate band.

We are concerned, of course, about the regressive effect of the change—particularly the way in which it will impact upon those who are not the poorest in our society, but next to them. They are typically persons in work but earning £100 a week or less. The freezing of allowances and the expanding of the lower rate must cumulatively have a regressive effect.

Single people with incomes of £3,535 up to a level of £5,535 are £18 worse off because of the changes, but everyone with an income of less than £5,895 must be worse off with the lower rate band than they would have been with the indexation of personal allowances.

Because of this, the parliamentary Labour party has tabled an amendment whose intention is to restore allowances. By this means, we wish to help those in our society who are on poor wages. We object very strongly to

the dishonesty of the construction of the Government's tax policies. We also object very strongly to the use of the lower rate band and the freezing of allowances to make changes which are demonstrably regressive.

Mr. Tim Smith: It is a matter of considerable regret to me that I shall not be serving on the Finance Bill Standing Committee and shall not have the opportunity of hearing the entertaining words of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown).

It is worth recalling the background to any debate on the indexation of personal allowances, especially as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is present in the Chamber. Hon. Members will recall that in the 1970s there was no obligation on the Government of the day to index personal allowances. When inflation reached 25 per cent., in 1975, there was pressure, not only from the Opposition of the day but also from the hon. Member for Perry Barr and his colleague who is now the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), to change the law.

This was successful, and that change has been one of the most important and radical changes to tax law in the last 20 years. It is now incumbent on the House, if it does not want to index, to make a positive decision in that sense. The change was more important in those days, the late 1970s, when inflation was running at an average of about 15 per cent. per annum, than it is today. None the less, it is important even today.

A decision not to index these allowances should not be taken lightly. I would be the first to recognise that, if one does not index allowances, one is increasing the tax burden on those people on the lowest incomes. That was precisely the concern of the hon. Member for Perry Barr when he pursued this issue so assiduously, and ultimately so successfully, in the late 1970s. I am very glad that at that time the Conservative Opposition supported him in that endeavour, because it was a very important change.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I agree with what my hon. Friend is saying, and he is making an important point. I wonder whether he is aware of the statistical background against which this argument is taking place. Over the five years between 1974 and 1979, the Labour party cut the real value of the single person's allowance by 21 per cent. In the period since we have been in office, including this year's proposals, the single person's allowance has risen by 25 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the Committee of the background to the decision, but I was not surprised at what he had to say.

The concern of hon. Members at that time was not only that there had been substantial increases in tax rates in the Budget of March 1974—when Denis Healey had increased the standard rate of income tax from 30 per cent. to 33 per cent.—and in the following year's Budget of March 1975, when the standard rate was increased again from 33 per cent. to 35 per cent. In addition, we had 25 per cent. inflation and no indexation of tax allowances. As a result, not only was there a massive increase in the tax burden for every income tax payer, but his bore down particularly heavily on people on low incomes. That was the concern of the hon. Member for Perry Barr. By that time, much of the damage had been done, because changes were not made until the Finance Act 1977.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): It was 14 June 1977.

4.30 pm

Mr. Smith: It was 14 June, 1977. The hon. Gentleman has that date etched on his memory—rather as I do 28 April 1977 when, partly as a consequence of the huge changes in taxation, I was elected to the House for the first time. I remember the miners of Ashfield showing me their pay slips and telling me of the massive increase in the tax burden they had suffered under Denis Healey, the most unpopular Chancellor ever in Britain. We will never again have such an unpopular Chancellor because of such a massive increase in the tax burden.

Mr. Rooker: Will the hon. Gentleman give us a forecast of when he thinks the tax burden will once again be reduced to the level that it was left by Denis Healey?

Mr. Smith: At that time, people were concerned about direct taxation. Funnily enough, and it is a rather strange thing, most people have a good idea how much tax they pay—for example, in local taxation. My post suggests that people have a pretty good idea of how much council tax they pay. It is a tax with a high profile, as it should be. So is income tax. People get a pay slip every week and they can see how much income tax and national insurance is being deducted. However, if the average person in a pub was asked how much tax he had just paid on a round of drinks, fortunately, he would probably have no idea.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): Fortunately.

Mr. Smith: It is extremely fortunate, and it is true for all Governments.

There is no doubt that some ways of raising tax are less painful than others, simply because they have a lower profile. Some taxes have the advantage of being buoyant, some do not. There are many different considerations when one is deciding on the most sensible tax structure, but all those factors need to be taken into account.

At that time, people were concerned about direct taxation, and they are still concerned. They are concerned principally, but not exclusively, about tax rates, but they are also concerned about tax allowances and the point at which their income starts to be taxed. The minimum amount that one can earn before one has to pay tax is an important question, and we are considering it this afternoon. It is not a decision to be taken lightly to decline to increase the tax thresholds. One needs to give that serious consideration, and it is precisely what we are doing in the debate.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East referred to the 1981 Budget. I am probably right in saying that it was the last occasion on which such a decision was taken. That may not be so, but it certainly involved a large increase in taxation. He referred to a figure of £2 billion, and I believe that was the figure by which taxes were increased in 1981.

Although the circumstances were not the same in 1981, they were similar in some ways. There is no doubt that the Budget in 1981 was extremely unpopular—of course it was; no one likes having their taxes increased, it is as simple as that—but it was also a very courageous Budget, which established the foundations for economic recovery throughout the 1980s, because it tackled the problem of the public sector borrowing requirement. The Chancellor,

[Mr. Smith]

Lord Howe—Sir Geoffrey Howe, as he then was—made a clear commitment to sound finances on the part of the Conservative Government.

We had to deal with the difficult problem of the PSBR, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done the same this year. This, too, is not a popular Budget, and we do not have to look far to see why. If we look at page 6 of the Red Book, we find that taxes are to rise by nearly £500 million in the current financial year, by more than £6·5 billion next year and by more than £10 billion the year after. Of course such measures are never likely to be popular.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It would help my understanding of these matters if the hon. Gentleman could explain why —if the Government were as committed as he said to sound finances in 1981—the situation has since deteriorated to such an extent that it is necessary to have tax rises to reaffirm the same commitment that was given then? What has happened over the last 10, 11 or 12 years? Why have matters deteriorated in such a way that we need to hear the same speech?

Mr. Smith: I do not want to leap about like a grasshopper in what is a carefully prepared and thought out discourse. I will come to why we now face such a large PSBR, to which the hon. Gentleman referred in his speech.

The decision not to index personal allowances must be seen in the broader context of the important need to raise revenue to tackle the PSBR. The point that I was making is that Sir Geoffrey Howe in his 1981 budget did exactly that. It was extremely unpopular at the time, but it established a basis for economic recovery throughout the 1980s. It will not be long before we think the same about the 1993 Budget.

Mr. David Shaw: My hon. Friend says that this is not a popular Budget. Will he consider that very carefully? It has been popular with overseas holders of sterling, who have seen that the pound is worth supporting and that the Government have been running the finances well; it has been popular with overseas purchasers of gilts; the Government's borrowing requirement has been well met by support from overseas purchasers; it has been popular with business men, who feel that it is the basis on which recovery can be built; it is clearly popular with overseas investors, who still intend, as far as one can see, to locate their businesses here; it is clearly popular with the people who can help us create jobs in this country. Perhaps my hon. Friend will consider that it is a popular Budget with all the people who count, but what we must do is explain it to the people better——

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not being popular with the Chair. We are supposed to be discussing personal and married couples' allowances.

Mr. Shaw: I understand your point, Mr. Morris, but if I can make the key point——

The Chairman: Order. No.

Mr. Smith: I have to say that I was taking a rather narrow view of popularity: I was referring to the voters in my constituency. I accept what my hon. Friend says—he makes an important point—because, in the long run the Budget did appeal to the people he is talking about. They too recognise that the decision not to increase the personal allowances was not an easy decision to take. It was a difficult decision, but the right decision in the circumstances. In the long run, it will have very great benefits. There are two different contexts.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The hon. Member is comparing the 1993 and 1981 Budgets, and he is saying that the latter laid the foundations for what he seems to think was a recovery in the 1980s, and that the former will do the same for the 1990s. But surely in 1981 it was unnecessary for the Government to freeze the uprating of personal allowances in line with inflation. Why then is it necessary in 1993, given that he has drawn the comparison between the two Budgets?

Mr. Smith: I think that I am right in saying that the Government did exactly that in 1981. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) also confirmed that that was the case. That is why I was drawing a parallel with 1981. I was saying that on both occasions difficult decisions had to be made in order to provide a sound basis for economic recovery.

I want briefly to deal with a point raised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East. He asked why the Government did not increase the standard rate of income tax, rather than, for example, increasing national insurance contributions. It is an important point that needs to be addressed. I suggested to him that it was because the national insurance fund is a separate fund. Some people tend to trivialise the matter and say that it is of no consequence, but I attach importance to this and to the contributory principle, for many reasons that it would be wrong to go into in the present debate. I accept what the hon. Member says about the Treasury supplement. I would like to see us get back to a national insurance fund which is properly funded.

What I wanted to say about the decision not to index the tax allowances was that it needed to be looked at in two contexts. The first is that of increasing taxes overall. That is what will happen. I have already quoted the figures to the Committee. It is one of a number of different measures, some of which could be described as more progressive than others. We could have some debate about which taxpayers will be hit hardest by this. I think that the figures that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East quoted earlier, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, were prepared before the Budget. At least, it sounded like it to me, because he referred to an increase in the 20 per cent. band of £1,000 whereas, as I understand it, the 20 per cent. band will be increased by only £500.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: That is what I said.

Mr. Smith: Yes, the hon. Gentleman made that point, but I was suggesting that, as the figures from which he was quoting referred to £1,000, they must have been prepared before the Budget, or, if they were prepared after the Budget, they must have been prepared by someone who had not read the Budget properly.

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Whichever it was, they were not very helpful figures, because they did not refer to what had actually happened.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I said that I was quoting from the IFS's green budget,

which was prepared in advance of the Budget. It is a document with which he is perfectly familiar. The graph on the distributional effect was prepared on the basis of £1,000, and I acknowledged that the band had been expanded by only £500. But it does not affect the broad distributional effect, the fact that the poorest neither gain nor lose because they do not pay tax, the next poorest lose and the people who are slightly better off may gain a little, but not a lot.

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend might like also to ruminate on the fact that, although the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East quoted from an IFS report on what might happen on the basis of its green budget, he very noticeably did not quote from the IFS analysis of what will happen as a consequence of the Government's actual Budget. It has analysed the distributional effect of the Budget, and the evidence that it has produced shows almost precisely the same tax take all the way up the income scale. Decile by decile, the effect of the Budget is the same, according to the IFS.

Mr. Smith: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for confirming what I was about to say, which was that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East had, first of all, quoted from a document prepared before the Budget and, secondly, had looked at two measures in isolation rather than looking at all the Budget measures together.

Let me take one example, the taxation of company cars. We all know that the amount of benefit in kind which is subject to taxation if one has a company car has been increased year by year for the past five years or so, and has now reached the point—I fully support this, I may say—at which taxpayers are now required to pay tax on the full economic benefit of having a car. We also know that most people who drive company cars are on higher salaries, and we must take account of that in assessing the overall distributional effects of the Budget.

I am therefore most grateful to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary for confirming what I believe—that it is important to look at all these cases together, although we are just debating the one change at the moment, the decision not to index tax thresholds. If we do that, we find that the effect is reasonably fair for everyone. We must all bear a bit of pain, and all income tax payers must pay a bit more.

One of the more important of the difficult decisions made by the Government to raise more revenue was not to increase the tax rate. Some people have said that it would have been more straightforward to do so, and they have asked why the standard rate or the higher rate of income tax was not increased. I believe that it would have been a mistake to do so.

4.45 pm

To increase either of the tax rates would have been a major disincentive for people, a step backwards. What my hon. Friends at the Treasury have done is to take another major step forward to a tax rate of 20p in the pound. That is very good news indeed. It is our ultimate objective, and we have taken another small but important step towards it in this Budget. In the long run, it will be a very popular decision. At the time of last year's Budget, the decision was derided by some. They said that the Chancellor had got it wrong, but only a few weeks later, the electorate decided that the Chancellor had got it right. It was the right decision to introduce a 20p tax band. It was a decision that I supported, and I very much welcome the present decision to increase the tax band.

I want to have a look not just at the need to fund the public sector borrowing requirement, although I feel that it is incumbent on Opposition Members, if they object to every tax increase, to say where they would get the money from. It was noticable in Monday's debate that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) consistently refused to say how a Labour Government would increase taxes. That is not a responsible action. With a large PSBR, some decisions to increase taxes are necessary, and we should be told what the Labour party's alternatives are. But I do not suppose that we will hear anything about that in this debate. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Gentleman wish to say something? If so, it is normal practice here to stand up.

Mr. George Howarth: (Knowsley, North): If the hon. Gentleman is trying to tempt my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham into responding, perhaps he could say how he thinks the Chancellor should fund the PSBR next year. If he cannot do so—and I suspect that the Chancellor cannot—how can he expect my hon. Friend to say how she would do it in two or three years' time?

Mr. Smith: There are published proposals that take us through to March, 1996, three years away. They are projections, but what else could they possibly be? They cannot be statements of faith.

I will tell the hon. Gentleman something. The Treasury has been widely criticised for failing to forecast what the PSBR is likely to be, but I refer the hon. Gentleman to a table in the Red Book—which I will probably be unable to find now because of the size of the Red Book and the fact that I need to keep on talking while I look for it. Because we now have a panel of independent advisers, somewhere in the Red Book—my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary may be able to find it for me—is a very interesting table which shows that each of the independent forecasters has made a separate forecast for the PSBR, and that in 1995-96 the discrepancy, if I remember rightly, is between £20 billion and £50 billion.

That demonstrates the difficulty of forecasting a figure which is itself the difference between two very large figures. It is like trying to forecast the balance of payments. So what the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), who keeps intervening from a sedentary position, should appreciate is that forecasting is an extremely inexact science.

While the Treasury has got it wrong, so has every other economic forecaster. The table, which I now learn from my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is on page 54 of the Red Book, shows that Mr. Wynne Godley has the highest forecast of PSBR, at £60 billion, in 1994-95. It is only next year that we are talking about, less than a year away. Mr. Godley is forecasting £60 billion, whereas Mr. Congdon is forecasting £38 billion, a difference of £22 billion in the forecast of the PSBR for next year. That illustrates the difficulty in forecasting the PSBR.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Would the hon. Gentleman care to make a few comments on the forecast immediately before the last election of tax decreases year on year, made by the Chancellor—and the Prime Minister, I think?

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): That was not a forecast; it was a promise.

Mr. Smith: Unfortunately, I do not have last year's Red Book with me, so I cannot say what tax decreases were forecast. But, of course, the main tax decrease that was proposed in last year's Budget was the introduction of the innovative 20p tax band to which I have already referred, which was opposed by Opposition Members but was widely supported by the electorate only a month later in a general election.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about the 20p or 20 per cent. tax band, but does he not agree that that was offset last year and this year—last year by the increases in VAT and this year by the proposed increases in VAT?

Mr. Smith: I have already said that increases in taxes are unpopular, but Governments have to make unpopular decisions sometimes, in the national interest. That was an unpopular decision that will form the basis for sound economic recovery.

Mr. David Shaw: My hon. Friend is talking to an amendment on revenue raising and the issue whether we should be raising additional revenue. He drew attention to the fact that the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), refused to detail how alternatively she would raise additional revenue. Does he conclude that, if she proposes to keep the PSBR the same, she now really wants to reduce public expenditure? Is that not a major change for the hon. Lady and the Labour party? Does the Labour party now want to cut public expenditure significantly, if it will not raise additional revenue?

Mr. Smith: I am very sorry to disillusion my hon. Friend, but I recall that, in her speech on Monday, the hon. Lady's solution to the PSBR was to cut taxes and increase spending. She said "Let's have more spending on education and training, and let's have more investment allowances for companies." That means lower business taxes and higher public spending. I am only a simple accountant, but if one cuts taxes and increases spending, I think I am right in saying that one adds to the PSBR. So I do not think that the hon. Lady's solution is the right one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is entirely right. There are only two possibilities: one has either to increase taxes or to cut public spending. Those are both difficult and unpopular decisions that Governments have to take.

The second yardstick by which this matter should be considered is the decision in the Budget to devote what help was available to business ensuring that the tax cuts that could be made went to business. That was the right balance, I think, at the present point in the economic cycle.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dover said, as a result of that, this Budget was widely welcomed by business. If we look at the table on page 6 of the Red Book, we can see why. The decision not to increase business rates by more than indexation will cost the Exchequer £370 million this year, but that decision has been widely welcomed by business, as has the decision debated last night to improve VAT relief on bad debts. That will cost £150 million in the current year, but it will bring immediate relief to many companies that have cash flow difficulties.

There is an important balance here between business taxes and personal taxes. I believe that the Government have that balance right, too, so it was right in the Budget to make some increases in personal taxation, and that is why I support the clause.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The trouble with the small, but important, steps towards the 20p band to which the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) referred is that individually they often have the effect of not helping the poorest and lowest earners. That is a point to which I shall return in a moment. To be in favour of a general objective is not necessarily the same as supporting proceeding to it by steps which do not in themselves help the people it is supposed to help.

We have on the Order Paper two amendments with the same objective as the amendments that the Labour party has put forward today. They would stop the Government from failing to increase the personal tax allowance, but continue the freezing of the married couple's allowance. By a neat bit of gazumping, the Labour party in the course of the past three days put down more amendments, thus widening involvement in this debate.

The freezing of the personal income tax allowance brings more people into tax. I remember speech after speech by Chancellor after Chancellor and Financial Secretary after Financial Secretary saying how many people the Government were taking out of tax. If one freezes personal income tax allowances, one brings more people into tax, and they are by definition people at the lowest levels of income.

The married couple's allowance is not in the same category. Some people regard it as an anomaly because it is not related to whether there are children in the family. Freezing it seems to have become quite a common practice and to enjoy reasonably widespread support, but we would support that only so long as child benefit continues to be uprated annually, at least by the rate of inflation.

The Government are selling their 20p tax rate as if it is helping those on low incomes and is in some way a better measure than indexing the tax allowance. That is patent nonsense. The small steps taken towards the 20p tax rate, such as the one taken in this Budget, are not a significant way of helping those on the lowest incomes. It is, indeed, a kind of deception of the British people.

If steps to the 20p rate are paid for by not indexing the basic rate, one hurts the people the policy is supposed to assist. Every person with income above £3,445 will lose £18 a year, because the personal allowance should have been uprated by 2·6 per cent.—using the December 1992 RPI—to £3,535, which is £90 higher, and since they would have paid tax at 20p on that £90, the loss is £18.

Instead of uprating the allowance, the Chancellor has widened the 20p band, but this applies only to people with incomes above £5,445, so the income tax deduction from the new wider 20p band begins to offset the tax increase from not indexing only for people who have annual incomes above £5,445. It is only at incomes above £5,805 that the income tax cut from the wider band offsets the increase from not indexing the allowance, so from the point of view of those on the lowest incomes it is a poor bargain; they would have been much better off if the tax allowance had been indexed. The Chancellor continues to boast that the extension of the 20p rate is assisting the poorest in society, but in fact it does not have that effect.

The Budget shows the real reason why the 20p band method appeals: it can bring in more revenue by sleight of hand than it costs. The cost of extending the 20p rate by £1,000 will be £710 million in 1994-95 while the revenue raised from restricting mortgage tax relief to 20p in 1994-95 will be £820 million. The revenue raised from restricting the married couple's allowance to 20p in 1994-95 will be £910 million while the revenue raised from restricting the taxation of dividends to 20p will eventually be nearly £1 billion in a full year. So the gain to the Exchequer is larger than the cost. One begins to smell a rat when one sees that happening; one discovers that it is not a measure to help the lowest paid and it is also a revenue-raising measure.

The Chancellor, nearer the next election, will announce that he is widening the 20p band yet again. I use the word "Chancellor" in the way in which the Prime Minister now uses it, to denote whoever happens to hold that office. I say that advisedly because I have been passed a note saying that the Chancellor, speaking elsewhere, is announcing at this very moment that he does, after all, have some regrets. I have no information about which matters he regrets—we shall discover that on another occasion.

When his successor, whoever that may be, announces that he is widening the 20p band again to give millions of people a tax cut, will he point out that that 20p band has cost people money? The numbers will work out in favour of what the Chancellor claims to be his policy only if he fully replaces the 25p rate by the 20p rate. Given the PSBR forecast, there cannot be any serious possibility of that happening.

5 pm

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) referred to the basic decision in the Budget not to increase the standard rate, but instead to use the national insurance contribution as the means of raising the equivalent of a penny, or somewhat less than a penny, on the standard rate of income tax. The hon. Gentleman justified that by reference to the national insurance fund and to the fact that the insurance fund will be in deficit if that is not done. But it will still be in deficit even if that is done. This action is not a balancing act or an actuarial balancing of a contributory national insurance fund, but the Government raising a penny on income tax without breaching the doctrinal objection to raising a penny on income tax which their election commitments represent.

As the Government have broken so many of their other election commitments in the tax area, I think that we, as Opposition parties, could now absolve them from any further commitment or responsibility at all. Nobody believes that the Government are bound by any of those promises any more, so they are entitled to start assessing what might be good for the country as opposed to which of their promises they are prepared to break and which they are not prepared to break.

If the Government are to raise the equivalent of a penny on the standard rate, they should do it by the standard rate system and not by a system which fails to tax higher levels of income, fails to tax benefits and perks and fails to tax investment income. That is not a sensible route to take.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that it is Liberal Democrat policy to increase the standard rate of income tax?

Mr. Beith: We are in a rather different position from that of the hon. Gentleman's party. At the general election, we told people that in some circumstances we would raise the standard rate of income tax, and we defined those circumstances. The hon. Gentleman, who said that he would never raise the standard rate, can hardly criticise me when he now represents and appears to support the actions of a Government who have done so, and who have done it through the national insurance route and have used a quite spurious argument for doing so.

Mr. Dorrell: Would the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that he is distinguishing his position from that of the Labour party by saying that he is still bound by the commitments that he gave to the electorate at the general election?

Mr. Beith: That is an odd question from a member of the Government: I cannot fathom its intricacies, particularly in reference to the Labour party. I shall seek to uphold the policies and ideas that we put forward at the election. I hope that the Conservatives, like most political parties, will have the sense to notice if they are occasionally wrong. The Chancellor has announced that he now has some regrets, but so far I see no reason to change any of the policies that we advanced at the election.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The right hon. Gentleman will remember that, just weeks before the general election, the Conservatives were accusing the Labour party of proposing a £36 billion PSBR. Yet the Conservatives are now introducing proposals similar to those advanced by the right hon. Gentleman. After one year of this Conservative Government, the country is in an economic mess. I am sure that if we had a good look at the books any one of us could do a better job than the Government are doing.

Mr. Beith: It is nice to have such robust help in Committee. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point.

I wanted to argue the merits of being straight about using the standard rate rather than disguising standard rate increases through national insurance increases which do not bear fairly on people and do not raise so much revenue. The reason for that is that they do not apply to levels of income above £420 per week, they do not apply to benefits and perks, and they do not apply to investment incomes. We have proposed ways in which we could move from the present system to the wholesale amalgamation of national insurance with the income tax system. If the Government propose to add to the tax take, they should at least do so by using the standard rate income tax system.

There are huge costs to the Government and even greater costs to business from our persistence in running the two systems side by side. I do not share the belief of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield that we can somehow resurrect the contributory system which, in effect, has been destroyed. There is no actuarial balance in the fund; it is all a myth. The hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well; otherwise, he would tell me that there was not a £2 billion deficit in the national insurance fund and that it was all covered. He knows perfectly well that it is not covered and that the fund is not in balance.

Mr. Tim Smith: Entitlements to benefits depend on contributions. That is a good thing. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he would sweep all that away as well?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman must also know that most of what is paid out in the form of benefits is not based on contribution entitlements. The contribution side now plays a small part. The hon. Gentleman should reflect sometimes on the extraordinary position in which people such as his constituents find themselves. As Members of Parliament, we have to give them a letter which explains that their failure to make two contributions in 1956, of which they were unaware at the time, has left them unable to claim a benefit now. The whole system is creaking and groaning, and it is time for it to be replaced by one which streamlines the two measures. However, that takes us wide of the clause.

I am arguing that the Government are trying to use a variety of other devices to avoid doing what they would otherwise be doing in the circumstances. They would be saying, "We got it wrong; the economy was in far worse off a mess than we said; the PSBR is appalling and will continue to be appalling; we must raise more tax and we shall therefore raise the standard rate." That is what the Conservative Governments might have done in previous years, but they do not do it now because they have made a fetish of never raising the standard rate of income tax.

When we think about the allowances, we are bound to reflect on the strange perks and loopholes which still exist in the system. At the moment when the Government are exacting from people the extra costs of not indexing the allowance, Ministers appear still to enjoy the perk of having cars to drive them from their homes to their Departments. They still appear—I say "appear" because I get very evasive answers from Ministers—not to be paying tax on a benefit which is taxable for anyone in an equivalent position.

All sorts of mysterious perks and hidden benefits are still tucked away in the tax system. Such perks never work to the benefit of people at the lowest levels of income. Those people are hit by the full force of the pay-as-you-earn system, and if they are at the bottom of the scale they are hit far more forcefully than those at higher levels of income who do not have to bear the higher cost of national insurance contributions.

Mr. Milburn: The right hon. Gentleman says that he receives evasive replies from Ministers. I do not know whether he had an opportunity to read *The Guardian* this morning. The Financial Secretary is quoted there and I thought that his reply was far from evasive. He made it clear that, if he had to pay the full tax that was due on the perk, he would get up and walk.

Mr. Beith: Not only did I read the article, but there is a quotation from me in it, as the hon. Gentleman may recall. I do not remember those words being attributed directly to the Financial Secretary. A number of other interesting comments were attributed to other Ministers, or were said to have been made by unnamed Ministers.

In the course of the day, it has been drawn to my attention that, when the basis on which the concession appears to exist was introduced—it was part of a change made by Denis Healey when he was Chancellor which was intended to bring all journeys to work within the tax system—Ministers were told that it would not affect them and that it might be a good idea if they occasionally gave their civil servants a lift because that would help to emphasise the fact that the car was for business use and not a perk.

Mr. Tim Smith: Did Denis Healey say that?

Mr. Beith: I do not know who gave the advice, but I believe that such advice was given.

The clause and the amendments relate to those at the bottom of the tax scale who get none of the little let-outs and loopholes. They bear the full brunt of tax, and in a number of respects they will be disadvantaged by the small steps towards a 20p band if those small steps are financed by tax allowances not being indexed.

The work done by the hon. Members for Preston (Mrs. Wise) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) in the famous amendment was an important part of tackling poverty. It was a measure to ensure that the Government did not continue without statutory or parliamentary authority to scoop tax from those least able to bear additional tax burdens. In any year in which the Government fail to abide by the Rooker-Wise principles, they deserve to be challenged and tested, because the case that they have advanced for gaining extra tax income to deal with the PSBR is not improved when elements of that tax income seem to be earned unfairly from those least able to bear it.

The case is undermined by the fact that the failure to spend money on various investments has prolonged the recession and, therefore, increased the PSBR. If the Government want to come to the House and say, "Yes—we made a mess, we have a problem and we have a huge public sector borrowing requirement; as the Red Book shows, we shall have a huge public sector borrowing requirement even if we get growth; yes, we need to raise tax revenue to get that growth," why do they not use known, fair and trusted parts of the tax system to raise that revenue instead of raising it by the back door?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) described the freezing of personal allowances as a sneaky measure. He is absolutely right, because the freezing of personal allowances is a tax rise in all but name. The measure will hit both ends of the income scale. It will bring more people on middle incomes into paying tax at the higher rate. It will have a serious impact on poorer families in my region—hon. Members will know that my region has the greatest concentration of low-paid people in the country. It will ensure that they pay a hefty price for the Government's economic mismanagement.

I was taken by the speech of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who managed to dig himself into a substantial hole by arguing that, in 1981, it was necessary to do exactly what is being done now, in the hope that it would never be done again. However, 12 years later we have more unemployed people, a bigger public sector borrowing requirement and graver economic circumstances than ever before. Who was in charge during that period? It was certainly not the Labour party. The Minister and his hon. and right hon. Friends got us into the current mess. Frankly, the poorest people in the country are now paying the price for that mess.

The measure before us today is not only a tax on the poor—it is a tax on my region in the north. Across the country, 300,000 people who do not pay tax at present will be brought into the tax net for the first time. The 4·5 million people who are low-paid and who pay tax at the 20p rate at present will also lose. They will not gain a penny from the extension of the 20p band, but will lose

from the freezing of allowances. They will be asked to contribute to the £700 million tax bill that the freeze on allowances will cost taxpayers.

As usual, the Red Book is fairly categorical. We are talking about enormous sums of revenue that will be raised by this back-door tax rise. Inevitably, the measure will penalise those who are least able to pay. That is in keeping with the Government's record of switching the tax burden from the rich to the poor in the 1980s. The poor were certainly not invited to the tax-cutting party of the 1980s, but they are now being asked to clear up the mess. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield and his hon. Friends are to blame for that situation.

Mr. Tim Smith: Did the hon. Gentleman not hear the figures that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary gave to the House? Under this Government, the personal tax allowance has risen substantially in real terms, whereas it fell under a Labour Government. If the Labour party is so committed to the eradication of poverty, why did a Labour Government so furiously resist the Rooker-Wise amendment?

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman has read this Red Book and previous ones, he will know that the tax system has changed over the past 14 years, from one in which the rich paid more tax than the poor to one in which the poor paid more tax than the rich. It is a Robin Hood in reverse —and the figures are categorical. As the Financial Secretary knows, between 1978-79 and 1992-93, a typical family on average earnings has seen its tax burden rise from 35·2 per cent. to 36·7 per cent. of its income. Between 1979 and 1990, the poorest 20 per cent. of households saw their tax bill rise from 30·7 per cent. to 39·7 per cent. of their income, while the top 20 per cent. saw their tax take a fall from 37·3 per cent. to 33·5 per cent.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I refer the hon. Gentleman to some questions tabled by the then Labour Front-Bench spokesman, the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), about the effect on the tax take of reducing the top income tax rate from 60p to 40p. What he discovered in hostile questions was that not only the cash amount from the richest section of the community increased but the proportion which the richest section of the community contributed to the total tax take increased as well. The supply side effect was real.

5.15 pm

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman must have read my speech, because I am coming precisely to the effect of the top rate tax cuts and the contrast between the 1988 giveaway Budget under Chancellor Lawson and the current Budget.

The shift in the tax burden from the rich to the poor has been achieved by deliberate Government policy instruments. For the poor, it has been achieved by shifting the burden of taxation from direct to indirect taxes.

At the same time, a growing number of people on low incomes have been drawn into paying tax through fiscal drag, as their tax-free income has shrunk in relation to average earnings. For the rich, the shift has been achieved by huge cuts in the top tax rate. I shall refer to that point in a moment.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: We repeatedly hear the point made by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). The issue is that, by putting the tax burden on the rich, we are getting more tax from them. Is it not the case that that is a deception, and that the real reason why we are getting extra taxation is that many more people pay it because the indexes have not been raised in line with inflation in the way that they should be? Is that not something that the Government repeatedly try to get away with?

Mr. Milburn: As always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is yet another case of the Government trying to perpetrate a con on the British people. The information that I have from the Financial Secretary is clear—vast sums of money were given away in the top rate tax cuts. According to his parliamentary answers, £9·5 billion has been given away to the richest people since 1988.

Mr. Dorrell: So that we are proceeding on the basis of facts rather than assertions, I must point out that the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers in 1978-79 contributed 24 per cent. of the total yield of income tax. In 1993-94, that same top 5 per cent. is expected to contribute 32 per cent. of the yield of income tax. That is the top 5 per cent. of income tax payers.

Mr. Milburn: The Financial Secretary obviously wants to bandy statistics—I am happy to do that. Perhaps he would like to tell us how many people are in the top 5 per cent. and what the spread is in the benefits of top rate tax cuts. According to his parliamentary answers, almost 60 per cent., or £5·5 billion, of the £9·5 billion handout and giveaway went to top rate taxpayers in one region of the country—the south-east.

It is no wonder that there was a huge fiscal stimulus to the economy in the south-east but, of course, we are now suffering the consequences of overheating, shortage of skilled labour, pressure on the green belt and a huge explosion in house prices. The brakes had to be slammed on, as they were two or three years ago, and we are now paying the price. We are shivering as a consequence of a countrywide recession, which is the result of the sort of measures that were implemented in 1988 by the Minister and his predecessors.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: My hon. Friend referred to what the top 5 per cent. paid in taxation. Does he agree that their income also rose in that period?

Mr. Milburn: We have seen an explosion in the incomes of the very richest people. I described earlier how the top 20 per cent. have done so well, while the bottom 20 per cent. have done so poorly. There is no doubt that families on average earnings are, as a consequence of the Government's fiscal policy during the past 14 years, paying more of their income in tax than ever before. Those are the stark facts: the Financial Secretary cannot argue with them.

I give one example. A top rate taxpayer in the south-east of England is on average at least £10,000 better off as a consequence of top-rate tax cuts. The south-east has not been the biggest regional gainer. The south-west takes the lead in the top-rate tax cut league. It is interesting to examine which parts of the United Kingdom do least well out of top-rate tax cuts. Not surprisingly, Northern Ireland and my region, the north, received the smallest benefits as a consequence of the cuts in top-rate income tax.

[Mr. Milburn]

What a contrast between 1988 and the Finance Bill that we are debating today. In 1988, there was an enormous handout and a tax bonanza for the rich. As a consequence of the measures presented by the present Chancellor in his Budget this year, there will be tax increases of £6·5 billion in 1994-95 and £10·5 billion in 1995-96.

The cost of imposing VAT on heating alone will mean £950 million in higher bills next year and £2·3 billion in the following years. The whole country is paying the price for the Conservatives' tax bonanza for the wealthy in 1988. What they gave away with one hand to the very rich, they are taking back with the other from pensioners, families, the low-paid and those on middle incomes. It is an odd reversal of the Robin Hood story when the poorest end up subsidising the richest in our community.

Mr. Graham: The other day I spoke to a woman in my constituency who told me that she had looked at her diary for 1979. It was faded, but she noticed that her husband was working, her two sons were working and she was going on holiday to Benidorm. Now she is not going on holiday to Benidorm, her son is not working, her other son is on low pay and her man is almost crippled with illness.

In 1979, at least they were all working and they could afford to pay tax. Now 4 million people are desperate and 3 million people are unemployed. The other night we passed a measure which will mean that 9 million pensioners will have to pay through the nose to heat their homes. The Government are proud of that record. The crisis is one of their own making. My hon. Friend has elaborated on that well tonight.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right. He graphically describes the problems that the Government have imposed on millions of people in Britain. It is not merely a question of complacency. It is a question of the Government's inability to apologise to the British people. We saw that most graphically in the private notice question just before this debate. I will not go into that, Mr. Morris, because I can see that you wish me to move on. I will take that hint seriously.

So we are now all paying for that tax bonanza. By freezing personal allowances, the Government will force the tax burden of low and middle-income families through the roof. Rightly, people will feel betrayed by a party which in its general election manifesto just one year ago loudly declared:

"we are the only party that understands the need for low taxation."

The Conservatives' tax-cutting credentials have been shot through by this measure and other measures in the Finance Bill. In just one month next year—April—the British people will feel the effect of the cuts in mortgage interest relief at source and the married couple's allowance, the increase in national insurance and the introduction of the fuel tax. Ministers might not be so complacent then. Certainly the crisis of confidence which the Government face will not go away, because too many people are paying through the nose for the mistakes that have been made.

Mr. David Shaw: The Government have had a difficult Budget to prepare when we are, as we have now discovered, at the end of a recession. As we reach the end of the recession, sadly, unemployment—the lagging indicator—increases and the deficit continues to rise for some time after one has hit the bottom. There is no doubt that we are having to raise additional finance because we have an excessive budget deficit.

There are not many ways in which one can deal with an excessive budget deficit. Indeed, my accountancy career has taught me that there are only three: we can borrow, if someone will lend to us, but if the deficit is excessive, people do not want to lend to us; or we can raise additional revenue; or we can cut expenditure.

It is clear that no one in the Conservative party wanted major areas of expenditure to be cut. They did not want pensioners, invalids, or those on disability benefits to suffer and they did not want cuts in health service or education expenditure. Consequently, the Government have chosen the course of raising some additional revenue and they should be applauded for taking that courageous decision.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: If the Government decided that the right course of action was to raise revenue, why did not they seek to raise it from the very people who gained from the tax cuts that they introduced a few years ago? Why are the Government seeking revenue increases from the bottom part of the earnings structure when they gave those tax breaks to the top?

Mr. Shaw: As my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are living in a mythological world. In many instances, the top 5 per cent. who received the reduction in the rate of taxation have increased their earnings and the wealth that they have brought into the country. As a result, they have paid an increased proportion of the income tax bill. That is a major achievement and we must encourage that expansion.

I want the top rate of tax to come down lower. It is sad that we wish to cut only the basic rate from 25 to 20 per cent. We should consider how to reduce the top rate from 40 per cent. We are now competing in the world to bring the wealth creators to Britain. If we could encourage more of them to come here, more revenue would be raised from income tax at lower rates. That is the great achievement of the Government.

I return to my key point. We must either raise revenue or cut expenditure. The Opposition argue that we might be in a different world if they were in office. They say that the deficit would be considerably less. They are trying to con the electorate into believing that if they were in office, we would be in a make-believe world. That is the only world that would be different. One cannot say that if Labour was in office there would be no German recession, no French recession and no American recession. We live in this world. We do not live in the make-believe world that the Labour party would like to exist if it was in office.

So revenue had to be raised in the Budget. Clause 52, with which the amendment deals, is the right clause and the right measure to raise additional revenue.

Public finances have to be prudently managed. Reference has been made to the Labour manifesto's proposals which we costed at some £37 billion. I commend the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) for remembering that figure. That £37 billion was not what the deficit might have been; it was additional to any deficit that we now have. If Labour had been in office and the recession had continued—I am talking about the recession in America, Germany and France, which are

key export markets—we would be looking at a deficit not of £50 billion but of £50 billion plus £37 billion; a deficit of at least £87 billion, approaching £100 billion.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shaw: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who no doubt wants to explain how a Labour Government would have financed such a deficit.

5.30 pm

Mr. Cunningham: I shall not explain that aspect. I should have liked the hon. Gentleman to have gone on to say that the difference between the Labour party and the Government at the time of the general election was that Labour borrowing would have been used for investment, whereas the money that you have borrowed is to pay your debts. That is the fundamental difference between you and us.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is addressing me when he says "you", and I am not responsible.

Mr. Cunningham: I apologise, Dame Janet.

Mr. Shaw: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman because I, like many people, studied the Labour party manifesto carefully. More significantly, I made a number of interventions in the speeches of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen in the year or two before the general election asking if the commitments that they were annoucing at the Dispatch Box were firm commitments. I started to add them up on the back of an envelope and on my calculator. They were not capital commitments to invest in Britain's future. Many of them were revenue commitments to invest in more pay, more salaries and more bureaucracy. They were the sort of commitments that would have to be funded with increased borrowing. As an accountant, I know that to fund wages and salaries with borrowing is the worst sort of deficit financing.

Mr. Graham: I take the point that the hon. Gentleman did his sums on the back on an envelope. I am pretty sure that everyone in the Committee and in the country will agree that the Government, too, have done their sums on the back on an envelope. The hon. Gentleman has a fond interest in Scottish affairs. In Strathclyde we have lost more than 50 per cent. of our manufacturing jobs since 1979—166,000 jobs. The Labour party planned an investment and training programme. That was what part of the sum was intended for. That was welcomed by the people of Scotland and, I am sure, by the people of Britain who wanted Scotland once again to be the engine of recovery. The £36 billion of public sector borrowing would clearly have been welcomed. It would have provided a basis from which to build on in the future and we might not have had this recession, which has clearly been created by the Government.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is becoming a speech.

Mr. Shaw: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's contribution. As he rightly says, I have a great interest in Scotland and some Scottish affairs. I am sure that he will recall that under Labour, between 1974 and 1979, not just in Scotland but in the country as a whole, manufacturing output fell and we had a record number of industrial disputes and a major problem in getting enough investment in British manufacturing.

Yesterday, the Select Committee on Social Security heard from managers of the British Coal pension fund about its problems. It was notable that the deficits from the fund's investments occurred under a Labour Government who made generous contributions to compensate. The surpluses that have improved pensioners' benefits have come since the Conservative Government have been in office. Those surpluses have been earned from the success of British business and British industry, so there has been a major transformation.

We might well ask why some areas of Scotland, for which the hon. Gentleman and I share an interest and concern, have not benefited. I am concerned, even as the Member of Parliament for Dover, that some of the benefits in our economy are not filtering through into the Scottish economy. The only possible explanation is that too much of the Scottish economy is managed by Labour-controlled local authorities.

If we could shift the resource base from the Labour-controlled local authorities in Scotland into the private sector, my constituents in Dover would benefit from a better managed economy. The Government might not even have had to introduce clause 52. Public finances overall would be better managed because we would be spending less money in the public sector and getting more profitable investment and more profitable resource development in the private sector.

Mr. Graham: The hon. Gentleman mentioned Scotland, but he must realise that the Scottish public have rejected the Government for decades. I wish that the Scottish people could have a wee turn at giving the Prime Minister a bloody nose like the English and Welsh voters. I am sure that they would give him a real belt in the belly if they had the chance of a referendum.

Mr. Shaw: I do not want to stray too far from the subject, but the hon. Gentleman must accept that the problems that are developing in Monklands, East and a number of other key Labour areas show that a unique opportunity is developing for the Conservative party in the 1990s in Scotland. There is no question but that, when the people of Scotland see how much employment in the public sector is taking job opportunities from the private sector in Scotland, there will be a transformation in the Government's political fortunes in Scotland. That is already occurring, as can be seen from the improved results in Scotland at the general election.

But to return to my main point, if Labour had been in office we would not be sitting here today talking about whether we can afford to index personal allowances or other allowances. We would be talking about how to deal with a major deficit of enormous proportions—potentially £100 billion.

Dr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the rate of growth under this Government has been the worst of any post-war British Government and far worse than that of the previous Labour Government, that as a result unemployment is far higher and that that is the major reason for the high level of public sector borrowing?

Mr. Shaw: I just happen to have a graph here which I have produced on my computer. However, graphs cannot be recorded in *Hansard*, so I shall have to talk about it. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the real prosperity clearly existed in the 1980s. The only significant cuts in public expenditure where the line on the graph falls below zero took place under a Labour Government in 1975, 1976 and 1977. Since then, public expenditure and the nation's prosperity have continued to improve. Therefore, I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman says.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I should point out that he is going wide of the amendment. I have given one or two warnings already and if the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member persists, they will have to resume their seat.

Mr. Shaw: Thank you, Dame Janet. I desperately wanted to get back to the main point, but I was diverted into Scotland and some of the wider issues of the economy. I appreciate that you are being your usual firm self, but I realise, as I am sure do many, that a better balance in many areas of the economy, of which Scotland is one, between the public and private sectors, would mean that the private sector would create more jobs and there would be less deficit and consequently less need to restrain the increase in personal allowances in the way in which the clause does. That is the key point. The real issue raised by the Opposition in this debate is whether we should curtail allowances or raise the rates of income tax. The Opposition have not lost their old clothes. They have dusted them down again, having found them in the closet. They want to raise the rates of income tax. I cannot support that view.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: That is not so.

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman says that that is not so. If he does not want to increase revenue by raising the rates of income tax, either he must want to cut expenditure or he must want to borrow more. If not, I do not see how he will be able to meet the deficit which, as I said earlier, occurs not just in the United Kingdom but worldwide.

Mr. Brown: I made this point to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), but perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not paying his usual attention. In 1988, the Labour party voted against the Government's top rate tax cuts. That is still our position. We should not have a deficit if the top rate of tax had not been cut, for it amounts to a substantial sum of money. *[Interruption.]* The Financial Secretary laughs, but cumulatively that extra sum of money would have been available to the Government since 1988. The purpose of our amendment is not to increase income tax. Its purpose is to restore the allowances that the Financial Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are trying to freeze.

Mr. Shaw: I know that the hon. Gentleman uses a wide base when he studies these issues. He has heard of the Laffer curve. If the rate of taxation is too high, the amount of revenue raised goes down. The Financial Secretary has produced the figures and has shown that, by reducing the top rate of income tax, we have increased the revenue take from the top earners. That, surely, is the key point.

Mr. Brown: But the hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that now there are 1 million more of them.

Mr. Shaw: The point that I acknowledge is that the top 5 per cent. are paying more as a proportion of the total income tax take.

Mr. Dorrell *rose*——

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend wish to confirm that point?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) is completely wrong. The group of people about whom I was talking numbered 1·3 million in 1978-79. In 1993-94, it numbers 1·2 million, so, for what it is worth, there has been a fractional reduction, not a big increase in the number of individuals concerned. What has increased is the share of the income tax burden that those 1·3 million or 1·2 million people contribute. That share has increased sharply, from 24 per cent. to 32 per cent. of the total yield of income tax.

Mr. Shaw: What my hon. Friend has said shows that it is a truism that, if we reduce the rate of income tax, we increase revenue. That must be a very important lesson. I know that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East wants to rise and confirm that those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench have now learnt that lesson.

Mr. Brown: We are talking, I think, about different groups of people. If I heard him aright, the Financial Secretary is talking about the top 5 per cent. of high earners, to whom he referred earlier, whereas I am referring to all those who pay tax at the top rate. The hon. Gentleman's argument is absurd. If one received more revenue by reducing the tax rate, the logical assumption is that even more revenue would accrue to the Government if one reduced the tax rate yet further, but that obviously is not the case.

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman knows how the graph works. He also knows how the calculation works: that at a tax rate of 100 per cent. there is zero revenue, because there is no point in going out to work. The hon. Gentleman must also know that if one reduces tax rates to too low a level, the Government will not raise the maximum amount of revenue. The key point of the Laffer curve as it is computed is that the optimum tax rate is of the order of 15, 20 or 25 per cent., depending upon which country one is in and depending also upon the financial base that one uses. It is clear that, even at 40 per cent. tax rates, there may be the opportunity to lower still further the top tax rate and increase revenue. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East told me off for not paying attention, so he should not converse with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), but perhaps he suffers from my weakness from time to time.

The key point is that the Government have made the decision not to change allowances, thereby increasing revenue, instead of attempting to raise additional revenue by increasing the rate of income tax. That would have been a disincentive. It would not have been the right thing to do as we come out of the recession. It would have put on the motor car's brakes; it would have stopped the engine; it would have taken away the fuel that can help us to get out of the recession. The Government have done the right thing and it was a sensible decision to make.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is not it clear from these exchanges that the Opposition have learnt nothing from the experience of

the past 14 years? Some people may think it incredible that my hon. Friend should suggest a tax rate of 100 per cent., but there was a tax rate of 98 per cent. in 1979. That was the rate that we inherited.

5.45 pm

Mr. Shaw: I agree with my hon. Friend. If ever there were a case for a "quickie" general election, it would be on the basis of what we have heard from those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench today. The Opposition have no new taxation policy to present to the British electorate. All they want to do is to tax the British electorate more and more and to employ more and more civil servants and bureaucrats. The Opposition still have the wrong policies for tackling the economic issues that face us as we come out of the recession. The fact of the matter is——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. How does this relate to the amendment under consideration?

Mr. Shaw: You are right, Dame Janet. Again I have been taken slightly away from the point. I was carried away by my enthusiasm for increasing our majority and having another term in government.

The key point is that we are still wedded to reducing the rate of income tax over a period of time. That was featured consistently in our successful, election-winning manifestos. The Opposition want to tackle the tax issue differently. They want to raise tax rates and change the way in which taxes are raised. Our policies contain the right balance. The Budget was skilfully constructed in the middle of a worldwide recession that is causing great difficulties. The Budget deficit continues to increase and the lagging indicator—unemployment—is inevitably at a higher level than one would like.

Clause 52 reflects the fact that both the foreign and the domestic financial markets have given the Government a considerable vote of confidence. The British electorate should recognise the fact and consider giving a further vote of confidence to the Government in any future by-elections. That vote of confidence should be based on the difficult decision that is reflected in the clause we are debating.

Mr. Rooker: What we are debating today, if we cut through the bull and the smears on Opposition policies by Conservative Members today, is a tax increase on the low-paid. At least 300,000 people, who would not otherwise have to do so, will now have to pay income tax. Furthermore, those at the bottom end of the tax threshold —4·5 million people—will not enjoy the benefits that they ought to receive. We shall no doubt hear the Financial Secretary refer to what happened between 1974 and 1979. That point has already been made clear in interventions.

My conscience is clear. My record is okay. The same cannot be said of the Government's record. In 1993, the tax burden on the British economy is greater than it was in 1978-79. Compared with this Government's record, the last Labour Government have nothing to apologise for when it comes to the tax burden on the British economy. I freely admit that the burden is shared differently—hence the steps that I took as an individual hon. Member in 1977. Earlier, I interrupted from a sedentary position to remind the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) of the date —14 June.

If the Finance Bill had not been amended in 1977, we would not be able to hold this debate today. We can debate this proposed tax increase on the low-paid because of what happened in Committee on 14 June 1977, when I and my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), then the Member for Coventry, South-West, moved amendments on indexation. It is not the fault of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but that night we did not enjoy the support of the Liberal party. John Pardoe was upset because, as part of the Lib-Lab pact, he was obliged to vote with the Government. He was very distressed because indexation was Liberal policy.

I want to consider the obnoxious tax increase on low-paid people, and in doing so I shall give a couple of statistics on the tax burden. Between 1978-79 and 1992-93, as a share of income, the tax burden—income tax and national insurance—declined for single people, married couples and people on average earnings or above who had children. In the same period, the tax burden for people on less than average earnings also fell, with the glaring exception that the share of income that family units—couples with children—on less than average earnings pay in tax and national insurance, taking into account child benefit, is greater now than in the last year of the Labour Government. The share paid by the poorest families—those on three quarters or half average earnings—is higher than under the previous Labour Government. They are a unique group.

It is tedious to keep repeating statistics, but I will give the figures for a family with two children and 50 per cent. of average earnings. Hon. Members might regard 50 per cent. of average earnings as irrelevant or unrealistic, but average earnings are alleged to be £340 a week. When I say that, most of my constituents say "Don't talk silly—our wages are nothing like that," and that is true of the majority of people because the average is not the majority.

The share of income that a couple on 50 per cent. of average earnings with two children paid in income tax and national insurance, minus child benefit, in 1978-79 was 2·4 per cent. whereas in 1992-93 it was 6·3 per cent.

Mr. David Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No.

The share of income paid by a couple on 75 per cent. of average earnings has increased from 14·6 per cent. to 15·5 per cent. In other words, whatever changes have occurred in that period, couples on less than average earnings with children have suffered uniquely and their position will be made worse by the freezing of tax allowances, which is why the clause is so objectionable.

Mr. Dorrell: I have made a calculation for a married man with two children—a single earner in the household —on half average earnings. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, since 1979 and at today's values, the real take-home pay of that person has risen by £67·30p a week?

Mr. Rooker: Absolutely—I am coming to that. I am talking about the income share that such a family pays in tax and national insurance. The share that they pay from their household earnings has gone up, whereas it has gone down for everybody on more than average earnings. It has gone down for single people, married couples and families on more than average earnings. It has gone down for single people on less than average earnings. It has gone down for married couples on less than average earnings without children. It has, uniquely, gone up for couples on less than

[Mr. Rooker]

average earnings with children. What a record—low-earning families with children are the poorest-paid and the hardest stressed group in the country.

The important point is the share. We are talking about the community kitty for the country. That is the purpose of taxation—for people according to their means to pay into the community kitty. Why are the lowest-paid families on less than average earnings with children paying a larger share of their income than in the last year of the Labour Government? Why should their share of the community kitty have gone up when everyone else's has gone down?

Mr. Dorrell: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the changes in the totality of the tax system which have been made since 1979 may have led to the enhanced rate of improvement in the take-home pay of every group in the community, including the group that he is talking about?

Mr. Rooker: Exactly, but relative to everybody else the share of the burden that they are asked to bear has gone up. The Minister cannot deny that. No one denies that their absolute earnings have gone up. Earnings kept ahead of inflation in the 1980s, which caused some of our present difficulties, but why has their share of the community kitty increased when everybody else's has gone down? Why has the share of income that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), as a Member of Parliament, perhaps with outside earnings, has to pay gone down? Why should the poorest paid families on less than average earnings with children, uniquely, be asked to pay more? The Minister argues that their earnings have gone up, but the share of earnings that they are asked to pay has gone up while everyone else's has gone down.

That is the reality of the debate and not what the hon. Member for Dover was saying. An increase in taxation is being proposed for the poorest people in the country. They are being asked to pay a bigger share of their income in tax than anybody else. I was opposed to that in 1977 when I proposed amendments in Committee and I am opposed to it now.

I do not deny that the spending power of all families and sectors has increased, but those on less than average earnings have done substantially less well than the better off. That is my argument. My argument is one of fairness between groups in society—those on low incomes and those on high incomes. I believe that people who have high incomes should pay a bigger share, and indeed they will pay a bigger share this year, but during this Government's term of office their share has gone down while the share taken from the poorest paid families has gone up. That needs to be emphasised and constantly repeated. That is why we oppose the clause, which stops indexation.

Mr. David Shaw: I believe that at one stage, the hon. Gentleman referred to household income rather than individual income. The average household income increasingly includes the incomes of two people—husband and wife—because more women work today under this Government than when Labour was in office. As a result, a higher rate of income tax may often be paid in a two-income household, because when the two incomes are added together more taxation is paid at the higher rate. That can often account for the phenomenon that the hon. Gentleman has identified.

6 pm

Mr. Rooker: I used the term "household income" as a figure of speech, but I was talking about earnings, and the figures that I cited related to earnings. Generally speaking, when figures are produced for a married couple with two children, it is assumed that there will be one earner and one non-earner. the wages earned by some of the women in the families affected are so low that they would not make any difference to the tables, which are produced by the research staff in the Library on the basis of parliamentary answers.

I have been talking about low pay, so by definition I have been talking about earnings, and about people who have jobs. We must not forget that the unemployed are also subject to taxation at certain periods. During the year in which they cease to be employed and during the year in which they obtain another job, unemployment benefit is part of their annual taxable income. The impost does not fall only on people with a low-paid full-time or part-time job; the unemployed are also caught in the tax net now. Some of them are also subject, at the margins, to the effects of the clause and the freezing of personal allowances.

The Minister may say, "What is all the fuss about? It is only £18 a year."

Mr. Dorrell: At the maximum.

Mr. Rooker: Yes, that is the maximum—or rather, it is £22 a year for the average family but £18 for a single person. People will say, "Eighteen pounds? That is chicken feed." Hon. Members may pay that much for their lunch or their supper, or even leave that much as a tip after their supper. But I have met constituents—my hon. Friends have met such people, and I know that Conservative Members have met them, too—who could not raise that sum at any stage in their yearly existence.

I thought of a couple of examples today involving unemployed constituents seeking to get back into work, who had used the opportunity of unemployment to further their education. But they could not pay the exam fees. One person could not pay the £10 assessment fee for nursing training. When people are that low down the income scale they do not have the money. That is why it is wholly unfair to ask those people to pay an increased share of taxation. It is immoral—there is no other word for it.

I do not accept the argument that the sum is small, because I consider that sum not in isolation but in the context of the generality of what other taxpayers are asked to pay. There should be fair shares. The well-off should pay their fair share, but the clause freezes allowances in such a way that they will not pay as fair a share as they would otherwise have done.

One of the long-running advantages of the 1977 indexation measures—although they have subsequently been amended, the kernel of them remains—is that these days at Budget time the Treasury publishes tables which make a good comparison with what the figures would have been like if there had been indexation. Indeed, I was amazed at the brass face of the Budget press release dated 16 March, with its illustrative tables on income tax rates and allowances. Every hon. Member has an average of 500 constituents who will now pay tax at 20p in the pound although they did not pay tax before the Budget. The average number is 500, so some hon. Members will have many more constituents in that position.

The Treasury tables showing the annual effects of the income tax changes in the Budget, compared with what

indexation would have provided, has to assume an increase in incomes. When comparing one year with another one must not assume that incomes will stay the same; one must assume an increase in earnings. I thought that the Treasury would assume an increase of 1·5 per cent., but not on your life—the Treasury assumed an increase of 4 per cent.

Why did the Treasury assume that incomes would increase by 4 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1993-94 when there is a 1·5 per cent. pay freeze in the public sector which also runs through the low-paid part of the private sector? What brass face the Treasury and Ministers must have to approve the use of 4 per cent. as an illustrative figure when they have introduced a pay freeze of 1·5 per cent. That is outrageous. When the Financial Secretary winds up the debate, I should like him to tell us why the figure of 4 per cent. was approved. That figure does not represent reality for most people.

I shall finish soon, because the point has been well made that the effect of the clause is a massive tax increase for the low-paid. The burden is greater for the low-paid—especially if they have children—than for the rest of the country, and to that extent it is extremely unfair.

Because of the increased burden of taxation on the low-paid, we are creating in this country an underclass of citizens who are bewildered by the system and who struggle to make ends meet from one week to the next. Hon. Members all know this from what they hear in their constituency surgeries, and from the letters and telephone calls that even Conservative Members mention. In a debate not long ago, a Conservative Back Bencher referred to the people who shuffled into his surgery with a haunted look in their eyes, the down-beaten and downtrodden who could not cope because of the increased tax burden and the cuts in benefits that his own Government had brought about. I shall not cause that Conservative Member any more trouble than he is already in by reminding the Committee of his name.

According to the average figure, 500 constituents of mine will pay tax at 20p in the pound rather than paying nothing as, because they are so low-paid, they would otherwise have done. I am speaking for those people tonight, as my hon. Friends have spoken for their constituents. No Conservative Member has said, "Well, that is it. I have some low-paid constituents, and it is tough, but they will just have to pay more tax." Conservative Members will not have the courage to say that.

Instead they will say that the budget has to be balanced and extra revenue is needed. Nobody denies that, but why take from people on lower than average earnings a greater share of their income than is taken from people on higher than average earnings? That is wholly unfair, and we shall certainly pin it on the Government.

What will the money pay for? The Government were open about that. The brief published on Budget day gave a little summary of the measures for 1993-94:

"The Chancellor proposes that there should be little net change in . . . 1993-94. Certain taxes are reduced: there is help for business and the housing market".

There certainly is help for business. Some of the extra taxation brought in by the clause—brought in off the backs of people so low paid that they were not paying tax at all—will help to fund businesses such as the Heron corporation so that money can be forked out for the Ronsons of this world.

The idea is outrageous. It is beyond belief that that is the sort of business that the Government are supporting. They will raise taxes on the low-paid and say, "Yes, we want to get business going," but they give no directions and no special incentives to ensure that that money is put into real investment to create real jobs, now factories and new businesses. No—businesses will be able to do exactly what they like.

Mr. Tim Smith: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but the Red Book shows that the main factor was the decision not to increase business rates by more than the rate of inflation. Had that decision not been made, many businesses might have been pushed over the brink and jobs would have been lost. There is a balance between jobs and income tax. Which would people prefer to have—a job, with earnings on which they had to pay income tax, or no job?

Mr. Rooker: For my sins, I was the Opposition local government spokesman in 1987-88 when the Bill introducing the poll tax was in Committee. It took 200 hours. We were dealing with the business rate, the poll tax for business, and we shot the Government's arguments to pieces. The rates that business pays as an overall proportion are minuscule. I do not accept the argument that to help businesses we have to impose more taxes on the low-paid. That is what I cannot justify. We cannot consider one small provision of the Bill in isolation.

This provision will raise money on the backs of the low paid. What will it be used for? It will be used to reduce the tax burden on businesses. It is unfair to expect people whose earnings are 50 per cent. of the average to pay a bigger share than the average Member of Parliament or the Gerald Ronsons of this world for the purpose of reducing the taxes paid by businesses. Nobody is on lower pay than those who until now were below the tax threshold.

There must be no taxation by stealth. In this regard, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield was quite honest and open. As I look at the Strangers Gallery, to which I am not supposed to refer, I expect that very few people realise that what we are debating here is a big increase in taxation. What is being done is not being done by stealth, as in the past. The Committee has an opportunity to debate and to vote. When I found out in 1977 how the system worked I objected strongly. The roof came in on my hon. Friend the Member for Preston and myself for what we were doing. We were criticised by the press and by the leadership of our own party. But then the penny dropped as messages came in from pensioners' groups and trade union branches. It is much fairer to have things done in the open.

The tax burden on the poor is too great, and the Government are reverting to the previous process. Next year they will say that the rate of inflation this year was only 2·6 per cent. and that the forecast figure for the following year is 3·6 per cent.—nowhere near the level of the late 1970s. They think that if they get away with freezing allowances in one year, they will get away with it again. We are returning, step by step, to the old system of taxation by stealth.

This process must be opposed at every turn. In 1981 I came to the Chamber and opposed what was being done. I will act similarly today, and I will continue to do so. I do not take any pleasure in this. It takes time, and it is not

[Mr. Rooker]

easy to explain to people outside. What members of the public do know, however, is that under the Budget taxes on the low-paid have increased.

I should like to make again a point that I made at the end of the Second Reading debate, when between the end of the Financial Secretary's winding-up speech and the Division I used the procedure of the House for a couple of minutes without upsetting everyone. In the course of a visit to Hereford and Worcester that day, I was asked what I was doing about the Rooker-Wise amendment. The person concerned, having been sucked back into the tax system many times, understood how it worked. He was so close to the margin that he knew he would be in the system for half of the year and out of it for the remainder.

I understood the mechanics. He realised that the Budget would result in freezing—that, having been sucked into the tax system, he would stay there. He regarded that as wholly unfair. I told him that, having been on the Opposition Benches for 14 years, I did not have much responsibility for the situation but that I would go to the House of Commons at the first opportunity and raise the point.

Mr. David Shaw: This is why the hon. Gentleman is in opposition.

Mr. Rooker: Far from it.

The point that I am making illustrates the unfairness of freezing allowances. By definition, as everyone knows, the burden on those with less than average earnings is disproportionately great. The Government will not increase income tax by a penny in the pound, because that would have the reverse effect. They do not want to attack the well-off. Tory Governments are bound to adopt this attitude. They talk about tax cuts, but they raise taxes. They talk about decreasing the tax burden, but they increase it—not only the overall burden on the economy but also the burden on the lowest-paid.

We shall nail the Government with this. It will not be easy, as was demonstrated in 1987 and 1992. It is not easy to get this message across, even during general election campaigns. The Conservatives always quote the 83 per cent. and 98 per cent. tax rates under the last Labour Government, as in the ebb and flow of politics they are quite entitled to do, but nobody ever paid at those rates. The average rate was far less. It was stupid of the last Labour Government to have high tax rates that were not actually used. They were warned that those rates would be used against them. At the other end of the scale, the system was such that tax revenue could be raised from the low paid.

Then the Tory party thought that it would be a good idea to introduce some truth into the tax system. The get-out clause was introduced by a former Chancellor, now Lord Lawson. At the back of the noble Lord's mind was the idea that a Tory Government needed a get-out. The Financial Secretary appears not to know what a get-out is. Perhaps I will have an opportunity to explain to him later.

Our original amendment on indexation was cut and dried. There would have been no get-out, but for an amendment tagged on at the end by a specific vote in the House. That is how the tax law was left at the time. Today we are at least guaranteed a debate, and some of us are able to demonstrate that it is very unfair to put this extra tax burden on the low-paid. I invite the Financial Secretary to defend disproportionately great tax increases for those people: he cannot do it.

6.15 pm

Mr. Dorrell: Members of all parties agree that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) takes a serious interest in these issues. Indeed, the Committee is indebted to him for the part that he played in 1977 in ensuring that we could have this debate today. He has said that at that time everybody was against him. As he would be the first to acknowledge, our parliamentary system does not work in quite that way.

Far from everybody being against the hon. Gentleman, the Conservative party of the time, of which I think my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) is the only representative present today, supported him. The Rooker-Wise amendment that has been referred to is, in fact, the Rooker-Wise-Lawson amendment. The action of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) was supported by the Tory party.

We do not resile at all from the decision that the Government took then. We believe that, as the hon. Gentleman has said, changes in the real level of allowances should be the subject of debate in the Chamber. That is precisely why we are having this debate. Thus far, at least, I go along with the hon. Gentleman. I shall refer later to some of his arguments that I found to be substantially less convincing.

I should like to start with something that ought to be obvious. My hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and Beaconsfield said that this element of the Bill is part of the total package that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced to deal with the budget deficit. It is most remarkable that a constant in the debates we have had on this Bill is the assertion—made sometimes in almost accusatorial tones by the Opposition—that these are revenue-raising proposals, as though we had somehow stumbled over them almost in a fit of absence of mind. It is true that many of the changes made in the Bill are put together as a revenue-raising package.

The reason for that should not be surprising or unfamiliar to any hon. Member. It is that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor faced the need to do something about the Budget deficit. The Government take the budget deficit seriously. As these debates proceed, it is becoming abundantly clear that the Labour party does not share our commitment to a policy of seriously addressing the deficit. Over the past few weeks and months, we have seen several examples of that lack of firmness of purpose. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has been anxious to rule out options which may help deal with the budget deficit. In January, on the radio, he said:

"I'm not talking about raising income tax or national insurance or VAT."

That was said by the shadow Chancellor, who acknowledges that the budget deficit is too high but is anxious to rule out the three key tax weapons available to do something about it. In March, just before the Budget was delivered, he said on television.

"I think at this particular point in time to raise income tax or national insurance or VAT would be a mistake."

So all three major sources of revenue available to the Government were explicitly ruled out twice, on the record, by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

While the hon. Gentleman has been busy telling the world what he would not do to address the budget deficit, his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) has been going round telling the world what she would do to make the budget deficit worse. She has been committing the Labour party to extra expenditure on training and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said, to more generous capital allowances. So, on the one hand, the Labour party says that the budget deficit needs attention: on the other, it either forecloses options for doing anything about it and opposes all proposals that are put to the House, or it comes forward only with proposals which would make the deficit worse.

The first thing that we have to be clear about in addressing the question is that we face a budget deficit that demands attention. The Government have a package of proposals to address the deficit. All the arguments from the Opposition Benches come from a party which has been anxious to foreclose as many options as possible for dealing with the deficit.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) was generous enough, as were other hon. Members, to acknowledge the second element: that the proposals for changes to allowances and thresholds have to be seen in the context of other proposals for changes to the income tax system, particularly the introduction of the lower rate band. The interrelationship between changes to allowances and changes to the lower rate band is a key element of the Budget package.

What the Committee would not have gathered from the speeches so far in the debate, particularly from the Opposition Benches, is that, for the single person who is a basic rate taxpayer, it is not a coincidence that the effect of the freezing of the allowances and of the widening of the basic rate band is precisely the same: they net out. For the single person on basic rate tax the freezing of allowances costs him £22·50 this year; the widening of the lower rate band benefits him to the tune of £22·50 this year. There is a statistical equivalent.

The married couple basic rate payer is £12·50 a year worse off as a consequence of the changes. Taking particularly the single person basic rate taxpayer, he is in precisely the same position after the changes as he would have been if the indexation proposal of the hon. Member for Perry Barr had been allowed to run its course in respect of both the lower rate band and the basic rate band.

There are differences. All higher rate taxpayers are losers as a consequence of the changes because the effect of freezing allowances is to ensure that the benefit available from the changes to the higher rate taxpayer is exactly the same as to the basic rate taxpayer. The hon. Member for Perry Barr was right to say that those who are marginal payers within the lower rate are to a varying degree losers in absolute terms, although I would argue strongly that they are also gainers in the sense that the marginal rate of income tax which they are paying is lower than at any time since the Government came to power.

The changes that we are introducing in the package are part of the progress that we can make to introduce a wider lower rate band which will have important positive benefits in dealing with the poverty trap, the unemployment trap and the sharpening of incentives, which must be an important priority for those on lower incomes.

Mr. Graham: Does the Minister realise that, for 14 years, we have been told that, once the Conservative Government got to grips with the economy, things would go well? For the past three years, we have been told that the end of the recession is round the corner. We have been told that by the Chancellor until he was blue in the face. The Minister is telling us that low wage earners will benefit. In God's honest truth, that is not the case. If we can prove that he is not right, will the Minister come back and reverse what he has said?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman suggests that people on average earnings, or the majority of people, have not benefited from the logic of the changes which we have been introducing for the past 14 years. As I said in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr, that is not true. Those who are on half average earnings have benefited in their take-home pay from the economic record of the Government to the tune of £67·50 a week in real terms since 1979. In the period 1974-79, the same group saw their real take-home pay increase by just over £8 a week.

People on average earnings are more than £80 a week better off than they were in 1979. Their income grew in real terms over the five years of the Labour Government by just over £1 a week. So there was an increase of £80 a week under the Tories and £1 a week under Labour; that is the contrast that answers the point made by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

I have said that we cannot consider the changes in allowances in isolation from the rest of the changes to the income tax system. Nor can we consider them in isolation from the other changes contained elsewhere in the Budget. I discussed that point with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield in an intervention based on the analysis of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. It took the Budget package as a whole and looked at the distributional effect of the increase in the tax burden which my right hon. Friend introduced in his Budget.

The institute—an independent organisation—concluded that the average loss as a percentage of net income was virtually the same right across the income scale, from the poorest 10 per cent. of households to the richest 10 per cent. All of them, to within a very narrow range of variance, contribute roughly 2·5 per cent. of their net income to the deficit reduction programme which my right hon. Friend introduced in his Budget.

Of course, if the Budget is addressing the deficit by means of revenue raising, there will be by definition an average loss in resources available to taxpayers. Those figures show that that loss is shared fairly across the income scale. We cannot consider it in isolation from other income tax changes, nor in isolation from other changes elsewhere in the Budget. Nor, most important of all, can we consider it in isolation from the history of the past 20 years. That is where the record of the Government bears very favourable comparison with the record of our predecessors.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr is entitled to mark himself out in regard to his responsibility for what happened to personal allowances under the Labour Government. The effect of his action on what happened during those years is extremely marked in the figures. The year in which he rebelled was the only year of the Labour Government's period of office in which personal allowances increased in real terms. Over their total period

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of office, the single personal allowance fell in real terms by 21 per cent. In the period since 1979, it has risen by 25 per cent.

6.30 pm

We will not accept any lectures from members of the Opposition Front Bench on the subject of the indexation of personal allowances; nor will we accept lectures from any member of the Labour party, even including the hon. Member for Perry Barr, on the subject of the living standards of people right across the income scale.

Mr. Graham *rose——*

Mr. Dorrell: I said in answer to the previous intervention of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, who is encouraging me to give way to him again, that the effect of this Government's policies taken as a whole has been to deliver a substantial increase in real take-home pay and living standards right across the income scale, benefiting the average wage earner by £81 a week, at today's values, this year, and benefiting the group on which the hon. Member for Perry Barr was focusing by just over £67 a week.

Mr. Graham: Anyone who thinks that the 3 million unemployed, the pensioners and disabled people have benefited under this Government is living in cloud cuckoo land. I want to ask the Minister what the Government have done with the money that they got from oil. How did they fritter that away? Why should we expect a pensioner to pay VAT on fuel and power when we had billions of pounds' worth of oil in the north of Scotland and in other places? How did the Government absolutely squander that?

Mr. Dorrell: One of the things that we have done is to increase by more than 50 per cent. the amount of money spent on the national health service as a result of the improved economic performance. Since 1979, we have seen a substantial improvement in Britain's economic performance, and this has been delivered to the British people by improving real take-home pay and social services. That was the commitment that we gave in 1979, 1983, 1987 and again in 1992. We have been delivering it for 14 years, and we will go on delivering it.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: I could not believe my ears when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that over the last 14 years Britain's economic performance had improved. If that is the case, why are we talking about borrowing, and funding deficits? The Chief Secretary has fallen into the trap of believing his own rhetoric. Last week showed that the Government listen to themselves and nobody else, and live in a totally different world from the rest of Britain.

The tragedy of this Budget is that, once again, the burden has been put on those who can ill afford to pay. As the Chief Secretary said, we cannot look at allowances in isolation from the rest of the Chancellor's package. If we look at the burden imposed by the lack of action in relation to tax easement from the lower-paid, add to that such things as VAT, and then start to work out what inflation will be 12 months hence, we can see this tremendous burden unfold.

If I were the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, or any other member of the Government Front Bench, I would be ashamed to be a member of a party that, after 14 years, has brought a great country like ours to such a state that we have to borrow tremendous sums of money and raise money to pay it back.

One or two have to be answered. Two or three times today, hon. Members have alluded to these, and once again we have to take them up. The Chief Secretary, for example, referrred to issues that he must talk about that have arisen over the last 20 years. If we go back 20 years, we are talking about the Heath Government.

Has the Chief Secretary forgotten, when talking about industrial relations, the three-day week and the fact that prices rose considerably, particularly petroleum prices? The members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries decided to put prices up, that led to inflation, and the 1974 Labour Government had to pick up the pieces. Let us remember a few facts when we talk about the improvement in Britain's economic position and start to compare records. I do not think that the Government have anything to be proud of.

The Chief Secretary talks about packages, and the Budget is a package, but nothing has been said during the debates or in anything that I have heard over the last few weeks about the balance of payments deficit. I wonder how much planning has gone into that. I wonder what taxes are in the pipeline for the future—or will it be higher interest rates, or perhaps a combination of the two?

Those are the things that the Government should start to think about, because we certainly do not want the stop-go situation again. The Government said 14 years ago that they would bring that sort of thing to an end. They were also elected on the slogan of lower taxation, but in reality we have had sneaky tax, hidden tax, and now taxation has been expanded through VAT. So, if they have not got on top of the deficit next year, will we see further expansion of VAT—for example, to newspapers, children's clothing, and so on?

Again, nothing has been done to help old-age pensioners or one-parent families. Instead, the burden on them has been increased.

That is a sorry indictment of this Government. They may try to find excuses, but the answer is that they have run out of alibis for their stewardship of this country over the last 14 years. The Chief Secretary must be very careful when he talks about improvements in Britain's economic performance, because the ordinary people in the street rejected his Government's policies last week. They are paying a terrible price for their tremendous efforts to put this country on its feet.

I welcome some of the initiatives to help businesses—I do not think that anybody who is concerned about unemployment could fail to do so—but we must ensure that small businesses get the benefits intended for them, and that sums of money in the form of grants are spent wisely.

This is a sorry Budget, a tragic Budget. The former Sir Geoffrey Howe's Budget in 1981 was supposed to set Britain in a new direction, on a new economic course, yet in 1993, we are looking at the same issues as we looked at in 1981. Those in the Government who call themselves accountants play ducks and drakes with figures, but the people of the country can do their homework; they can see the price that they have to pay for the follies of this Government. The Government may defend the highest 5 per cent., but we are very proud of the fact that we defend the lower-paid and people in the middle-income bracket.

The Government's recommendation must, I submit, be rejected tonight.

Dr. Berry: I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I want to respond briefly to a number of comments that have been made.

The proposal before us today is effectively to increase the tax burden on lower income groups, and we have been given some extraordinary reasons why this is appropriate. One extraordinary argument was that the tax burden had to be increased and it could not possibly be increased for those on higher incomes, who have benefited substantially from previous tax cuts.

Even good old Professor Laffer has been invoked, as if it is generally accepted that a little graph that the Professor scribbled on the back of a serviette in a restaurant in the United States a long time ago is somehow gospel and can be used to talk sensibly about tax policy.

I have to say that it cannot. The point is a very simple one. The argument rests on the proposition that, if we reduce people's taxes, they will work harder, so their incomes will be higher, and therefore they will pay more taxes. Ministers have given no evidence whatsoever that if, as has happened, the direct tax burden on higher income groups is reduced, they will work more overtime and consequently pay more income tax. The reason that they have not offered that evidence is that no such evidence exists. Exhaustive studies, not least by Professor C. V. Brown, have shown that income tax cuts on high income groups do not encourage greater efforts to pay even more income tax. It really is nonsense.

The Minister said that the budget deficit has to be corrected, but he did not recognise that it is so high precisely because of the Government's economic performance. I repeat my earlier point: that the Government have the worst record on economic growth of any post-war Government—1·9 per cent. per annum. The Government responded by saying, "No, you misunderstand. Living standards have improved".

Of course they have. If the Government had achieved the remarkable feat of negative growth, no doubt average living standards would have fallen, but even the present Government have managed to secure some economic growth over the past 14 years. It is the natural order of things. However, they have managed to reduce that rate of growth.

Living standards have improved for some people, because they have borrowed extensively in the financial regime created in the late 1980s. I advise the Government to worry as much, if not more, about the scale of private sector debt as they do about public sector debt. If they honestly believe that our economy is capable of sustaining increased living standards in the way that they have suggested, they are deluding themselves.

The clause is part of a tax package that in one sense is perfectly consistent with everything the Government have done. They have increased the tax burden over the past 14 years. It may be a useful device to tell people that they have not, but it is dishonest.

The Government have shifted the tax burden from the higher income groups to the lower. Not one person who has seriously examined the statistics would attempt to deny that charge. It is a charge, an accusation and a criticism. How can anyone conceivably support a tax regime that, year by year, is being geared to ensure that those on higher incomes get more and those on lower incomes get less?

Apparently, in order to encourage those on higher incomes to work harder, they have to pay less tax. Those on lower incomes are encouraged to work harder by paying more tax. That is the nonsense of the Government's position and I hope that the amendment will be supported in the Lobby.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The Minister told us about the regime that will operate, but he made no apologies for the fact that the wealthy people in Britain will become more wealthy as a result. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Quite clearly, the Treasury had an opportunity to redress the balance and tax the rich people in Britain substantially more and reverse the trend that the Government have been applying for a long time.

I was amazed to hear the Minister's glib reply to me about how the Government frittered away billions of pounds of North sea oil revenue. I wonder what happened to North sea gas, as the gas from the Government is quite stinking. We have the sickest geriatric Government ever. They are so old-fashioned that they are not just getting grey hairs; they are dying on their feet.

6.45 pm

Last week, the English and the Welsh consigned them to the bin and left them with just one council. That is no wonder, because they are utterly mismanaging the economy. There is no way they will get away with that anywhere in Great Britain. I would love the folk of Scotland to have an opportunity to register their protests, which would swing the boot at the Government. Perhaps the Government would then take a responsible attitude, instead of putting VAT on fuel and power, and at least folk would be able to live in a wee bit of comfort.

Will the Treasury Minister think about one issue that I have looked at recently? One of my constituents wrote to me and said, "Tommy, do you remember the hated poll tax, when the Minister came up with a rebate to get us out of the hole that we were in?" The people of Britain went bananas, they wanted rid of the poll tax.

Now the Government are committed to the council tax, and they have had to decide how to cover it. They increased VAT to 17·5 per cent. to provide an acceptable form of local government taxation because of the Government's absolutely massive blunder on local council finance.

The Treasury is producing these ways of balancing the revenue because they clearly got it wrong. They increased VAT to 17·5 per cent. VAT when the poll tax was abolished. Now the Minister expects elderly, disabled and unemployed people to pay 17·5 per cent. more for fuel and power.

I shall be glad to hear the Minister's reply in summing up. I find it amazing that VAT has been increased from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. to cover the council tax. Now they expect 9 million elderly folk, 3 million unemployed folk and all the sick and disabled folk to pay extra. It is absolutely incredible. I am delighted to give way to the Minister.

Mr. Dorrell: I have summed up. I have certainly said all I have to say on the subject, but I should like to correct one wrong figure I used in my speech and in an intervention in

[Mr. Dorrell]

that of the hon. Member for Perry Barr—and I apologise to him for that. I flattered the record both of the Government and our predecessors in terms of the effect on the real take-home pay of those on half average earnings. The figures should be that, between 1974 and 1979, those people saw their real take-home pay rise by just over £3 a week, and since 1979 by just over £25 a week.

Mr. Graham: When the Labour Government were in power, some folk in the House of Commons were still in primary school. I do not need a history lesson from any Minister. I remember the days when I started work. There was a Labour Government and I was employed in an apprenticeship. When I finished my apprenticeship, I went to work. I had a good job with good pay and could afford to go on holidays and buy my clothes: I definitely did not need to go to jumble sales and bag sales. That is what the Government have inflicted on the low-paid, the unemployed and the disabled. The Minister should come with me and see the result of his economic plan.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Will my hon. Friend tell me how many charity shops there are in his constituency? If it is anything like mine, he will find that in the past five years the only expanding industry is charity shops. What is the situation in his constituency?

Mr. Graham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I can see the Minister's face getting whiter, but it is not as pale as some pensioners will be in the winter, when they cannot afford heating because of the Government's VAT policy.

My hon. Friend is right. In my area, there has been a tremendous boom in charity shops. The Government have cut charity funding so much that they have had to open shops while folk have a wee bit of money. It is not the wealthy people who make contributions to charity; it is folk like mothers, aunties, brothers and sisters who do not have a lot of money, but will not go by the tin can.

I make this point to the Minister, and I will make him an offer. I would love the whole Cabinet to come with me on those visits. It would probably help them to make a bit more sense of their taxation regime. I would love them to come to the jumble sales, the boot sales and the charity shops. I would like to take them on a Friday and Saturday night to some of the supermarkets, where they will see the elderly women scurrying about to try and buy goods which are near their sell-by date at half-price. They will see something that I never thought I would see again—the queues for the second-hand clothes and all the women scrabbling for something that costs 50p. That is what the Government taxation system has created for our folk; it has got them begging.

My offer is a sincere one. I notice that the local Conservatives in my constituency have jumble sales, and do very well. They occasionally go along and buy the boots that the lords have thrown in—or even Tory Members have thrown in. We do very well; we may buy a pair of boots for 50p that will give us a couple of weeks more wear. Then they announce in the local paper that the local Conservative fete made a few hundred pounds this week.

Then, in the next couple of weeks, we notice that they are asking local Conservative Members if they will donate old clothes—there is a great need for old clothes in my constituency—so that they can sell them to make a few bob in order to return a regime which imposes a taxation system on the low-paid and which cripples and kills the elderly behind their doors in winter.

Already the price of fuel—coal, gas and oil—is so high that pensioners are dying behind their doors. This is absolutely genuine—I am not conjuring up a fairy tale. I can see from all hon. Members' faces that they know I am telling the truth. The taxation system has been wrong for the last 14 years. For 14 years, the Government have plundered this country's resources; they have squandered the money raised by privatisation and thrown it into the bin—the dustbin of unemployment. They have wrecked the economy by squandering North sea oil and gas.

I only wish that we could have a general election tomorrow. I am sure that a general election tomorrow would not just produce a change of Government, but would enable the elderly folk, the disabled and the unemployed to walk with pride again. They could look forward to a future with jobs, to where the grass grows green and is not made dry and arid by this barren Government. They are a hopeless Government; they have had their day. Let us give them a real knuckleduster. If they are so confident of their tax regime, let us have a general election now.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: During the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), I distinctly heard Conservative Members shout, "Tommy for Chancellor." I know that they are desperate to get rid of the present incumbent; nevertheless, I urge my hon. Friend not to cross the Floor to take over the job.

I also understand my hon. Friend's desire to take Conservative Members to charity shops, but he would probably get more for their suits than he would for their Government. I believe that the consumers in his constituency are a fairly discerning bunch: while they might purchase, at a knockdown price, suits that Conservative Members can clearly afford, I doubt that they would purchase a Government whom the country clearly cannot afford.

Let us not obscure the main point of today's debate—that the Government hope to raise an extra £2·7 billion in the financial year 1995-96. That is an awful lot of money. Of course the Government are trying to obscure the way in which it will be done; of course their proposals are not set out bluntly in the form of direct tax increases, as a number of my hon. Friends have pointed out. None the less, that will be the effect of the freezing of these allowances.

Interestingly enough—as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry) pointed out—the recession is affecting people with savings and people with private-sector debt in a similar way. Those with savings are trying to hold on to them, because they are frightened of spending and uncertain about their future. Labour believes that the only way to weather the present crisis is to deal with unemployment first: it is the core issue, and the Government should concentrate on it first.

Of course the public sector borrowing requirement, and indeed the revenues available to Government, are affected by growth rates. Of course, if the Government were able to restore economic growth to the point at which it should now be, more revenue would be available and they would be able to reduce the deficit. That, however, is not the history of recent years: we have experienced 10 successive

quarters of negative economic growth. That affects not only the PSBR, but the tax burden required to service or even reduce it.

I agreed with the Financial Secretary when he cited the work of the Institute for Fiscal Studies about the distributional effect of the whole of the Chancellor's Budget—although, of course, that same distributional effect does not apply just to the details of the allowances that we are discussing.

However, although what the IFS said about the distributional effect of the totality of this year's measures was correct, that does not apply to the whole range of tax changes that the Government have made since 1979. The main change has been the substantial shift from direct to indirect taxation, particularly through VAT increases: that has had a regressive effect on the poor.

The Financial Secretary's favourite line seems to be that real take-home pay has increased throughout the Conservatives' period of office. They are proud of that. The hon. Gentleman, however, is talking about—I believe —58 per cent. of our fellow citizens, who are in work. What about the other 42 per cent.—the unemployed, and pensioners? What has happened to their real earnings since 1979? They have not been as well off under the measures promoted by the present Government.

If we take the lower rate band alongside the freezing of allowances, it is clear that those earning below median earnings will be adversely affected by the Government's proposals—not the very poor; not those who do not pay income tax, and therefore are not affected by the positioning of allowances in lower-rate bands; but those on low earnings. As if that were not enough, I believe that there is widespread public resentment about the way in which the Government have gone about raising the taxes they need in order to deal with the current deficit.

Before the election, we were told that the Conservative party was committed to reducing taxation; then, in the Budget, we are told that VAT must be extended to domestic electricity and to charities. That is probably the most regressive single VAT adjustment that could have been made. We are told that employees' national insurance must be increased, not just for those earning above average incomes—the Labour party's proposal before the general election—but for everyone. That was after the Conservative party promised at the election that they would do no such thing. Moreover, we now have the adjustment of allowances proposed in the Bill.

What is done is regressive. It is a substantial increase in tax—£2·7 billion. I do not think that the Financial Secretary has made the case against the amendment, so I urge hon. Members to vote for the amendment standing in my name.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 236, Noes 277.

Division No. 286] [7 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*

Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gordon McMaster and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Moate, Sir Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George

Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.
Clause 52 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 67

DONATIONS FROM COMPANIES AND INDIVIDUALS

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to move amendment No. 46, in page 46, line 14, leave out '£250' and insert '£200'.

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. John McWilliam): With this, it will be convenient also to discuss amendment No. 47, in page 46, line 17, leave out '£250' and insert '£200'.

Ms Harman: We have chosen the question of the tax treatment of charities for this debate for three reasons. First, the demands on charities are growing. Secondly, donations to charities are falling. Thirdly, the effect of the tax changes in the Budget will be that the Government themselves take more money in tax away from charities.

The demands on charities are growing, first, because of the cuts in social services, which mean that more people are having to turn to charities for services previously provided by local authorities and the health service, and, secondly, because of the growth in unemployment and the growth in debt. There are also demographic reasons—in particular, the growing number of elderly people.

There is a pattern to the development of charitable services which shows that where the welfare state is being cut back and where it is failing to meet the growing demand resulting from demographic trends, including the growing number of elderly people, charities are increasingly expected to step in and provide the services that I think in general most people would agree should be a basic part of the welfare state.

7.15 pm

We support the work of charities and think that they are vital. That is why we have tabled amendments to this clause for debate. But what we do not think—and the charities are absolutely in agreement with us on this—is that the charities should replace the welfare state and take up basic services.

The role of the charities is very specific. I should like to give two examples of a particular role that they can play. In my constituency a club developed to provide day centre services for black elderly people. That was pioneering work. It was about developing a new way of providing services. It was a sort of gadfly role of the charities to show the social services that there was a different way in which they could provide such services.

There is also, for example, the work in relation to health services of organisations such as the Family Planning Association, where there has clearly been a need for services that have not been sufficiently provided by the mainstream health service.

So the demands on charities are growing, but increasingly the Government expect charities to step in and provide where the welfare state is retreating.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): May I pursue the hon. Lady's train of thought? Does she feel that, for example, the Macmillan nursing service and the hospice service—which we all know are a growth area, where so much is being poured in, because people want to do this work—should now be taken over by the state and administered by the state, or does she believe that they should go on? In Dorset we have just raised £3·5 million for our own hospice. That was a community effort; people wanted to do it on their own. Surely the hon. Lady is not suggesting that that should be taken over by the state.

Ms Harman: I think that the role that the hospice movement played was to show the national health service that there was a whole area of unmet need. The charities stepped in to meet that need. Increasingly, the demand has been that hospices, which are a vital service, should not simply be left to charities, but that the national health service should recognise that it has an important role in the care of the dying. That does not mean that the charities do not then have a role in relation to the terminally ill, because what they have done is provide services for the terminally ill at home; they have then moved their pioneering work into another area.

It seems to us that that is what the role of the charities should be—showing the way, developing new services, seeing what works. Then the social services and the national health service should learn from the work of the charities and move in. That is a very important role that the Macmillan nurses, the Crossroads care attendance scheme and the hospices, for example, have played.

If one talks to organisations such as the Crossroads care attendance scheme, they say "We've shown the need for these services. We have shown how they should be provided, but don't leave it to us to try to meet all this unmet need on a charitable basis."

At the same time as there is a growing demand for services, a demand that the social services and the health service are failing to meet, we have seen donations to charities falling, because of the recession. Because we are concerned about the work of charities, I was interested to hear the Chancellor say in his Budget statement on 16 March:

> "Since 1979, the Government have done an enormous amount to help charities . . . I now have two further changes to propose."

He announced proposals for increased tax relief on gift aid and payroll giving. He then said:

> "Taken together, they will boost tax relief on donations to charities by some £30 million in a full year."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 192.]

Those of us who were listening carefully to hear about the new measures for charities took that to mean that there would be an overall increase from the Treasury in assistance to charities. I am sure that my hon. Friends took it to mean that there would be increased assistance for charities.

I therefore looked in detail at the figures in the Red Book and at the figures in Treasury press releases. I also asked further written questions. When I received the answers, I was horrified to discover that there would not be an increase in tax assistance to charities as a result of the

[Ms Harman]

Budget. Quite the opposite is the case. The effect of the Budget proposals on charities will be to take money away from them.

I hope that the Paymaster General will admit that the impression that the Chancellor clearly intended to create —that there was extra help for charities in the Budget— was wholly misleading. There is no extra help for charities in the Budget. In fact, the Government will take more money from charities to help them to fill the growing hole in public finances. That is the first point that I look to the Paymaster General to answer. I hope that he will admit that the tax changes in the Budget, taken together, take more money from charities than they give back.

On the one hand, charities will gain from payroll giving and from gift aid. That is on the plus side of the charities' balance sheet under the Budget. On the minus side are VAT on fuel bills for charities and the reduction in the tax credits on dividends which are affected by the changes in advance corporation tax. We need to consider the effects of the changes over a period of three years, which is the best way to consider the matter. Whichever set of years we take, we find that charities will lose more than they gain. I am not trying to do some numerical trick here. It is fair to consider the effects over three years because the Government will phase in the ACT changes and the changes in VAT.

On the Government's own estimates—I ask the Paymaster General to confirm the figures—the charities will gain £83 million over the next three years as a result of the changes in payroll giving and in gift aid. That is the plus side on the charities' balance sheet under the Budget. On the minus side, on the Government's estimate, VAT on fuel will cost charities £60 million over the next three years. I am grateful for an answer to a parliamentary question which said that, in the first year, VAT will be £10 million and that in the second year it will be £25 million. I presume that it will be £25 million in the following year as well.

On the minus side of the charities' balance sheet is the tax credit on dividends and the effect of the changes in advance corporation tax. According to the Government's own estimates—again, I am grateful for an answer to a parliamentary question which arrived on 11 May—the loss to charities as a result of the ACT changes over the next three years will be £45 million. Over the next three years, the Budget will give charities £83 million, but over the same period it will take away £105 million.

The Paymaster General should apologise to the House for the misleading impression, which the Chancellor clearly intended to create, that the Budget would help charities. The charities will lose on the Government's own figures. The charities believe that they will lost out by more than £22 million in the Government's figures. The charities estimate that they are likely to lose out by more than £62 million as a result of the Budget. They believe that their losses as a result of the changes in advance corporation tax will be more than the £45 million over the next three years in the Government's estimates.

I know that the Paymaster General had a meeting with the Wellcome Trust about the issue. The trust has told me that it told him last week that it would lose £10 million as a result of the ACT changes because of the effect on its dividend income. The trust said that that would be 200 jobs gone in British universities. There is an important point here about medical research, much of which depends on dividend income. We look to charities to provide pioneering medical research; they also provide nurses to back up clinical research. The changes will affect not only posts in universities, but nurses and hospital beds.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am the chairman of Marie Curie Cancer Care in my local area, so I am keen to ensure that the charity is encouraged to raise as much money as it can for the good work that the Marie Curie nurses do throughout Britain. Has the hon. Lady taken into account in the figures some of the money that will be distributed by the national lottery? It is estimated that more than £200 million will go to local charities. Has she also taken into account the changes since 1979? Despite the recession, which we all recognise, charities are in a far healthier state today than they were in 14 years ago.

Ms Harman: I hope that the Paymaster General will clarify for the House the point that the national lottery was supposed to be additional money. It was not supposed to be a national lottery that would finance charities which do the work that the welfare state should be doing but is no longer able to do. That is an important point.

The hon. Gentleman said that charities were now in a far healthier position. We and the charities do not think that they are in a healthy position. We do not want to move back to a time when basic welfare services were provided through individual donations because the Government had abdicated their responsibility to provide care for the vulnerable and the elderly in our society.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Is the hon. Lady misleading herself and, inadvertently, the Committee by not recognising the way in which funding from charities has been used over the years? With the readers of *Woman's Own*, I raised money for the bone marrow transplant unit at the Westminster children's hospital. That money came from individual, personal donations.

The national health service union at the time wanted to reject that £1·1 million because it was not public purse funding. That is the reality for charities that have endeavoured to step in. Because of the inbuilt horror of private funding, the NHS unions, for example, and others like them have tried to reject such funding. The Committee should think of how many children would have died if we had not managed to overcome that block.

Ms Harman: Whatever point the hon. Lady is making, it certainly has nothing to do with the point that I am making and bears no relationship to the case that I am arguing. I have been associated with many charitable appeals relating to social services and the health service. Appeals for extra cots for premature babies, extra research and so on have always asked people to help charities to raise money to plug the gap left by the Government's failure fully to fund our national health service.

7.30 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): My hon. Friend shares with me the privilege of being a patron of the elimination of leukaemia fund which is based at King's College hospital. That charity has recently raised more than £200,000 to open a state-of-the-art leukaemia treatment suite at King's College hospital—an integrated part of that hospital. The sting in the tail came when the fund had to

pay about £25,000 to meet the VAT requirement of the conversion. It is absolutely clear, not that there is any reluctance to receive charitable giving, but that there will soon be a reluctance from people who stand on windy street corners with collecting cans to raise money to make good what this Government have failed to do. People do not shake collecting cans to raise money for the VAT man.

Ms Harman: A great army of charitable workers are prepared to give hours of their time to raise money. There is a sense of justifiable resentment on two grounds. Not only are they raising money—the position will be made worse as a result of the Budget changes—to pay net contributions to the tax man; they will need to raise money because the Government are cutting back on services that many people believe should be provided by the welfare state.

Ironically, this blow will mean that many charities will have to cut their services to meet the VAT bills and compensate for the drop in income as a result of the ACT changes. Many of those charities are in areas formerly controlled by Conservative county councils because those councils failed to develop the necessary welfare services —they simply left it to the charities in those areas.

Barnardos say that the changes in the tax dividends credit will cost them £200,000 in lost income, the Royal National Lifeboat Institute says that it will cost it £250,000 and the Royal National Institute for the Blind says that it will cost it more than £100,000. As I said, the Wellcome Trust says that it will cost it more than £100 million. There is no doubt that the cut in income will mean that charities will have to pay the Chancellor £105 million over three years, together with the VAT on fuel.

Miss Emma Nicholson: It is kind and generous of the hon. Lady to give way to me twice—I appreciate it. I suggest that the figures which she has quoted with compassion and thoughtfulness reflect the top 400 charities. The figures for those charities are published by the Charities Aid Foundation. There are 185,000 charities in the United Kingdom and, therefore, the picture of charities that has been put forward by the hon. Lady is limited.

The charities referred to by the hon. Lady receive substantial central and local government funding. In other words, to suppose that the totality of Barnardos' income —a wonderful charity—comes from people shaking tins on windy street corners is nonsense. For many years, it has received more than 50 per cent. of its income from the Government. That gives a different picture when we talk about that charity giving back in value added tax in terms of central funding.

Does the hon. Lady agree that the projected figures that she quoted will not be correct because they reflect a tiny minority of the charities in the United Kingdom? The Government's effort on lowering the threshold on gift aid and the tax on payroll giving will enable further fund-raising to take place and, therefore, the incomes of charities will probably increase.

Ms Harman: I will not give way to the hon. Lady again because she has completely missed my point for the third time. I mentioned Barnados, the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Wellcome Trust as illustrations—I was illustrating the Government's figures. The Government have not plucked their figures from the top ten charities. The figures are the Government's estimate of the effect of the changes on all charities. I note that the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) did not dispute those figures, and I hope that the Paymaster General will not dispute them. I remind him that the figures come from the Red Book, the Inland Revenue press release and written answers to parliamentary questions that I tabled.

Let us be absolutely clear. The figures are not simply projections from charities in general or the top ten charities; they are the Government's estimate of the amount that charities will lose as a direct result of the Budget measures. Over the next three years, the Chancellor will receive from charities £600 million from the VAT on fuel and £45 million from the changes to tax credits on dividends. Overall, the Chancellor will gain £105 million from all charities over the next three years.

I should be grateful if the Paymaster General could confirm those Government figures, although the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West, who has not looked at them clearly, disputed them. Charities believe that the Government's figure for the amount that they will lose on the ACT changes had been under-estimated—they think that they will lose much more. Of course, I have taken into account the phasing over the next three years.

As for the amount that charities will allegedly gain as a result of the Budget—the plus side of their balance sheets —the Government's answer to a parliamentary question was that the tax change for payroll giving would mean that charities will benefit to the tune of an extra £1 million a year. We then examine the Government's estimate that charities will gain as a result of the change to gift aid.

The Government estimate that the additional income on the changes to gift aid and its taxation treatment will be £80 million every three years—first £20 million, then £30 million and then £30 million. Even if one accepts those figures, charities will still lose about £22 million over three years. Charities think that that figure for gift aid is wildly optimistic.

A survey carried out by the Charities Aid Foundation shows that, between January 1991 and December 1992, 64 per cent. of charities experienced a real decrease in total income because of the recession, 67 per cent. reported a fall in new donations, and 61 per cent. said that there had been a fall in corporate donations. The income for charities from individual and company donations has fallen, yet the Government say that an £80 million tax credit will be available to charities as a result of the Budget change for gift aid. How do they work out that figure? They have assumed that there will be a spectacular increase in donations to charities from individuals and companies. It simply cannot be right that the Government can assume such an increase. Where is the evidence to justify that assumption? The evidence simply does not exist.

The charities do not believe that there will be an upsurge in charitable donations. If they are to benefit to the extent that the Paymaster General and the Government say from gift aid changes in the Budget, they must attract 45 per cent. more donations than last year. They cannot see how they will do that. Charities will have to receive £60 million more in donations of between £250 and £400 to attract the £20 million of extra tax relief in the Government's first estimate. Thereafter, they would have to receive an extra £90 million per year to attract the £30 million of relief next year and the year after in the Government's estimate. So when receipts from donations to charities have fallen, the Government offer an estimated

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benefit from gift aid, which has at its heart an assumption of huge increases next year, the year after and the year after that.

I hope that the Paymaster General will tell us how on earth he justifies what we regard as wildly over-optimistic figures for gift aid. Even if he is not prepared to accept that he has made an over-optimistic assessment—we believe that he should—he must not wriggle out of the argument that, even on his own figures, charities will lose significantly as a result of the Budget.

The work of charities is important. I would be important in any circumstances, but it is even more important when the Government are drawing back the welfare state and increasingly people are having to rely on charities. I hope that the Paymaster General will at least have the courage to admit that the Budget makes charities worse off. I hope that he will explain how he justifies making charities worse off in the next three years. I hope that he will also justify saying that charities will benefit to the extent that he says when the figures assume an increase in donations which charities simply cannot envisage in the next and ensuing years.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): It might be helpful if I intervene now and respond to any points made later in the debate if that is necessary. I am not sure whether it is strictly necessary for me to declare an interest. In a formal capacity as the Paymaster General, I am a trustee of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and hence of some of the related chairities. I am also treasurer of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation. I am also, in a personal capacity, trustee of a small charity which helps a children's clinic in east Jerusalem and of a church restoration charity. I hold a non-executive office in several other local charities.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) did not speak much about the clause. She widened the debate considerably. I shall first say a word about the clause and the amendment and then deal with some of the general points that she made.

The clause reduces the minimum limit for gifts to charities which qualify for tax relief under the gift aid scheme from £400 to £250 for gifts made by individual donors and close companies on or after 16 March 1993. I emphasise that date for reasons which will become apparent a little later in my remarks.

7.45 pm

The gift aid scheme was widely welcomed when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister introduced it in 1990 when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has already given substantial help to charities. The figures for the latest quarter have been published today. They show that during the tax year 1992-93 charities claimed tax relief repayments of some £73 million on gift aid donations of £218 million. That means that, over the whole period from October 1990 to the end of 1992-93, charities claimed tax repayments of £138 million on donations of £414 million.

As the House will be aware, the minimum donation was originally £600. It was then reduced to £400 and is now £250.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Does the Paymaster General have a breakdown of the figures for gift aid donations between charities? We have heard about the top 400 charities. Before I was elected to this place I was the director of a small charity. We had limited gift aid resources simply because the infrastructure needed to generate gift aid and payroll giving cost the charity money. That expenditure would have been speculative because we might not have obtained a return from it. I should be interested to know whether the wealth generated by gift aid and payroll giving schemes goes to the largest charities, which often do not need the money as much as the smaller charities in order to survive.

Sir John Cope: That is arguable, to say the least. The figures that I gave were for all charities of all sizes. I am afraid that I do not have a breakdown of them. It is not known how the figures break down between charities of different sizes. However, gift aid goes to charities of all sizes. Some small charities as well as large ones benefit. It depends to an extent on how much charities seek gift aid donations as opposed to other types of donation. Every charity has a different pattern of giving which it has built up historically and by which it lives.

The figures which the hon. Member for Peckham kindly gave the House were an estimated cost to the Exchequer as a result of the changes that we propose in the clause of £20 million this year and £30 million next year. I readily accept that that is not a precise estimate. The cost depends on the take-up of the relief by donors from year to year and on other factors. However, I hope that donors will take full advantage of the relief.

The hon. Member for Peckham implied that charities would need to receive £60 million more in donations to attract £20 million this year and an equivalent figure next year. But the relief will also apply to existing donations of £250 to £400 which might have been made in any case. So they would not necessarily all have to be new donations. They would be new to tax relief, but not necessarily new donations. The figure is not entirely inexplicable. I readily accept that it is an estimate. No one can be sure. We shall not be sure even when we see the figures at the end of the year exactly how much came from the Budget change. But that is the best estimate that our officials were able to make.

Sir Jim Spicer: The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) delighted in painting a doom and gloom scenario that was completely unjustified. Our new hospice, the small charity that I mentioned, had great difficulty in obtaining £600 donations. We then had a second crack at obtaining £400 donations. Now we are going out for the third time to obtain donations of £250 and we expect an enormous amount to flow in during this year. I should love to know how many hon. Members contribute through the payroll giving scheme, because I should have thought that there was considerable scope for an increase on that front alone.

Sir John Cope: I am not sure about other hon. Members, but I make a small payroll donation to one charity. Payroll giving relief has not been exploited as fully as it might have been. I hope that it will be developed more by charities in future, as my hon. Friend suggests. That would be a good thing because, as has been made clear —we shall come to this upstairs on clause 68—it is a small scheme in comparison with gift aid or other areas of tax relief in the amount of tax relief that it gives to charities, so it is capable of development from charities' point of view.

That makes the point that gift aid is only one of a range of measures. The amendment suggests that we should have brought the relief down to £200 instead of £250. The hon. Member for Peckham did not specifically address that in her remarks. But part of the reason why we did not is that we were anxious not to undermine regular giving by covenants and by the payroll giving scheme.

Many of the smaller charities to which the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) referred, such as churches, rely quite heavily on covenanted income. It gives them the assurance of a regular income, which they like from a planning point of view. Too large a reduction in the gift aid minimum donation could have had a substantial impact by reducing that income. That point has been made to us by the Charities Tax Reform Group among others and it is one that we took seriously.

That is why, when we examined the level of the minimum donation, we took the figure of £250 as providing a balance between encouraging more donors to take advantage of the gift aid scheme while at the same time safeguarding the interests of those charities that depend heavily on covenant income. Therefore, we do not recommend the amendment. However, the hon. Lady did not press it strongly, so she may have some sympathy with that part of my remarks.

The hon. Lady said that the role of charities was basically pioneering. I do not agree. That is part of the role of charities and it is a perfectly legitimate element of the activities of some charities, but many charities also have a continuing basis.

Charities cover a wide range of activities and are tremendously different. Some charities are large with big staffs and operations at home and overseas. Others are extremely small and run entirely by volunteers and the arrangement of their income differs a great deal. It is difficult to talk sometimes about charities except in terms of averages, which can be considerably misleading.

The hon. Lady accused my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer of being inaccurate or misleading in what he said in his Budget speech. But he was entirely accurate in what he said specifically about what has turned into this clause and clause 68, which was the passage that she read out, and also in what he said about advance corporation tax and charities in another part of his speech when he was talking about the changes that were being made at that point.

The hon. Lady also attempted a calculation based primarily on our figures in the Red Book and in answer to parliamentary questions to show the possible effect on charities of the Budget as a whole, taking the first three years. I hope that she will forgive me for pointing out that she was slightly inaccurate in the way that she put the figures together. On the giving side, as I said earlier, the provisions for relief on gifts apply immediately from the time of the Budget. The hon. Lady was correct in saying that we do not expect that payroll giving will involve more than about £1 million a year from the Exchequer and gift aid will be £20 million, £30 million and £30 million. That calculation was correct at £83 million.

However, I immediately add the caveat that I gave earlier. These are broad-brush estimates. I entirely accept that they are not and cannot in their nature be precise estimates of exactly what will happen. They are the best estimates of the likely effect of which I and my right hon. Friend have been advised.

The hon. Lady correctly identified the items that cost charities money, but she seemed to forget that VAT on fuel and power does not apply until next year and does not apply in full for two years. Dividends have a small implication this year. We estimate that it will be about £5 million on charities in 1993-94, £15 million in 1994-95 and £20 million in 1995-96. Again, that is a broad estimate, not a precise figure. I am not sure that we shall ever be able to give a precise figure in that respect.

If one accepts the estimate of VAT, the cost of that for charities is nil this year, 1993-94, because it does not apply at all, approximately £10 million in 1994-95 and £25 million in 1995-96. Those, taken together, total £75 million. The net effect of the Budget on charities during the first three years is a positive benefit of about £8 million. Therefore, the hon. Lady's point is not nearly as strong as she made it out to be. However, of course it is correct that there are items in the Budget that cost charities money, or reduce their income. We readily accept that that is the case and have acknowledged that throughout.

In part, it is true, too, that when we have reduced income tax the relief goes down. That has always been true. The traditional reliefs, as well as the gift aid and the other new reliefs that we have introduced, are less valuable if there is less income tax to refund to a charity on its income.

Nevertheless, because of the extra giving that has been encouraged, in part because of the extra money that people have in their pockets when they pay less income tax, for example, and because of the changes over the years, in 1979-80 direct tax relief for charities amounted to £175 million. In 1992-93, the year just gone, despite the reductions in income tax, and hence the reductions in money going in reliefs in that kind of way, the total had risen to £779 million in direct tax reliefs alone. There are also some special reliefs on VAT, both those that have been more recently introduced and those of longer standing. I do not believe that the reduction in income tax rates has damaged the income of charities.

These arguments are relevant when trying to calculate what the effects might be of Budget changes, including these changes. I believe that my right hon. Friend was right to introduce into his Budget the provision that is embodied in this clause. It was right to set the limit at £250 for gift aid and to make the payroll giving improvements which come under another clause. It would not be right, therefore, to accept the amendment.

8 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I agree with the amendment. The Government have made certain concessions, but they do not go far enough. Furthermore, the amendments do not go far enough. The gift aid and payroll giving concessions do not make up for the present shortfall, especially after the implementation on 1 April of community care. Many charities and voluntary organisations will have to pick up the pieces, because local authorities will no longer be able to provide various services. They will be unable to do so because the Government have not provided them with sufficient money to meet their community care commitments.

Charities will face tremendous problems in the present economic climate. People are in difficulties over giving money to charities. The result of unemployment in Rochdale and elsewhere in the country is that people are

[Ms Liz Lynne]

cutting back on their charitable giving. If there is an increase in gift aid and payroll giving, there is bound to be a decrease in other charitable giving. People have only so much money that they can afford to give to charities.

Charities do a worthwhile job. I have been the sponsor and patron of various charities for a number of years and I welcome the work that they do, but they should not do what health authorities and local authorities ought to be doing. For charities to receive an additional £30 million in gift aid, as the Government have suggested, would mean a staggering 83 per cent. increase in giving. No hon. Member can imagine for one moment that anyone will increase their giving by 83 per cent.

The change in the tax system introduced by the Budget will lead to charities receiving only 20p in the pound on investments. The Chancellor has admitted that over a number of years that will lead to a reduction of £50 million a year in dividend income. I have not plucked that figure out of the air, but that is not what the charities say: they say that their dividend income will probably be reduced by £100 million.

The Government's concessions will not meet the present shortfall. Charities are extremely worried about the future. I spoke this evening to representatives of one charity who fear the effects of a decrease in charitable giving. The hospice movement, which does a very good job, is in great difficulties. It is competing against other charities. I support my local hospice, but I am told that it will be unable to attract the amount of money that it needs because VAT on fuel and power will hit so hard. The fact that there is no VAT exemption for charities is despicable.

The Government say that they want to help charities, but they have done nothing to help them in this Budget. I hope that they will do more in the autumn statement than the feeble attempt that they have made to help charities in this Budget.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I welcome clause 67, which will lower the minimum limit for gift aid from £400 to £250. This is the second time in the short history of gift aid that the Government have sought to lower the limit. As my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has just told the Committee, gift aid has already proved itself to be a most valuable instrument for raising money on behalf of charities. This reform is a modest improvement to the scheme, but it needs to be seen in a larger context—the progressive development of fiscal support for charities throughout the life of this Government.

In 1980, Sir Geoffrey Howe doubled the capital transfer tax exemption on bequests to charities to £200,000. He also exempted charities from development land tax and reduced the minimum period for covenants from seven to four years. Year after year since then, in Budget after Budget, in Finance Bill after Finance Bill, we have seen the development of fiscal incentives and tax reliefs to encourage charitable giving and to support charities.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Did not Lord Howe also double VAT to 15 per cent. which, as the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said, cannot be claimed back by charities and is a heavy burden upon them? Whatever the tax concessions given by the Government may be, was not the doubling of VAT to 15 per cent., and its extension to 17·5 per cent., a greater burden than any tax concessions by the Government could offset?

Mr. Howarth: It is true that VAT was raised substantially at that time, but the purpose was to enable income tax to be brought down. Lower levels of income tax have made a huge difference to people's capacity to make their own decisions as to how to spend their money. That is one of the reasons for the substantial growth in charitable giving in the past 14 years.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is it not the case that when value added tax was first introduced it proved impracticable to give complete VAT relief to charities and in the early 1970s concessions were made to charities which were sufficient to offset that tax? Subsequently, time and again there have been further reliefs for charities. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one took away all the concessions that have been made to offset the effect of VAT and got rid of the VAT problem itself, charities would be a great deal worse off. Is it not a fact that the measures taken to offset VAT are far more beneficial to charities in relation to the impact of VAT?

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend speaks with particular authority on these matters. He was, indeed, the father of VAT—a title of which he is justly proud. I acknowledge the force of my right hon. Friend's argument.

Ms Lynne: According to the Government's statistics, there will be a loss of £22 million over the next three years. The figures provided by charities suggest that the loss will be even greater than that, so I do not understand the point made by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir. T. Higgins).

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Lady diverts me from the development of my argument. If she will allow me to do so, I shall try to make progress. We shall no doubt return to this issue at a later stage of the debate.

What I hope to demonstrate is that the reforms, albeit modest, that the Budget makes in the interests of charities have to be set in the longer-term context. Under the 1983 Budget, the wages of staff seconded to work for charities were made allowable against tax for their employers. In 1984, tax relief on family cars which had been substantially adapted for use by disabled people was extended. In 1986, the tax treatment of close companies was reformed in the interests of charitable giving and payroll giving was introduced. The Bill marks the fifth occasion on which the Government have sought to develop and improve the payroll giving scheme. We have seen VAT concessions, such as that in 1989 on fund-raising events.

Taking all those measures and many others together, the value of charitable tax reliefs is now about £900 million. There is therefore no doubt whatever about the Government's commitment to support charities and the consistency with which the strategy has been developed. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister's personal commitment and his sensitive awareness of the needs of charities are well appreciated in the charitable world.

The history that I have briefly related has made eminently good sense. It is appropriate that a Conservative Government should nurture a tradition of charitable giving which dates back at least to the Elizabethan Statute

of Uses of 1601. Government have an indispensable, bedrock role in the relief of poverty and in the provision of care for people in need, but it is essential that we also build local and personal responsibility, that we mobilise the generosity of society and that we encourage the better parts of human nature.

In the words of Sir William Beveridge in 1942, what is needed is a

"comprehensive policy of social progress."

Beveridge always preferred to talk in terms not of a welfare state but of a welfare society, and it is always necessary to improve both the welfare state and the welfare society. They are part of each other. It is always necessary to think anew about how we can better match the resources of society to the developing challenges that we face. I put it to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that state bureaucracies are a necessary but insufficient means to this end.

Let us recollect that the origins of the welfare state are twofold. It derives from 19th century paternalism and from 20th century egalitarianism. Its origins are political and its manner of operation is bureaucratic. It is magnificent, but it is limited. It is powerful, but it is inevitably crude. People's needs vary infinitely. No one's needs conform to any standard and the problems of individuals are not susceptible to remedy by standard means. The state must provide basic guarantees—indeed, it must provide more than basic guarantees—but charities are an essential complement to the state. I was sorry that the hon. Member for Peckham was unwilling to see charities in that role. She spoke of charities as gadflies and as pioneering. She is right on both points, of course, but I should like her to acknowledge that charities are indispensable and valuable permanent partners to the state in its undertakings.

Charities, after all, have qualities that I would term entrepreneurial. The hon. Lady may feel that that is a term imported from an alien culture and that it is inappropriate. But at their best, charities are motivated to find out and meet demand, and to respond to changing needs. They work from the bottom up, not from the top down. They have a depth of local knowledge and a sensitivity to local circumstances. They are animated by the enthusiasm of their staff and their voluntary workers and not by direction from on high in big organisations. They sit loosely to convention. They are willing to experiment and innovate. They are energetic. They have a delicacy and a precision that the broad brush of bureaucratic provision inevitably lacks. They respond to individual needs and not to the abstractions of policy.

I do not mean to idealise charities. Too many charities are hidebound, timid, amateur and incompetent, but the best are creative in the senses that I have described and we need them more than ever. Clause 67 is right and necessary because it builds on the support that the Government have given to charities.

Charitable and voluntary work meets the needs not only of the recipients but of the givers. To help one's fellow men and women has a profound appeal to many people. I think, for example, of retired people looking for outlets for their energies and talents. I think of those for whom the ordinary routines of getting and spending are simply not sufficiently satisfying in their personal lives. I think, too, of unemployed people, and in this regard this week's Incomes Data Services report offers us all matter for reflection.

8.15 pm

It is, of course, very encouraging that unemployment among women had fallen to about 5.6 per cent. at the start of the year. But unemployment among men remains high at 14.1 per cent. We cannot realistically hope that the gap will quickly close, and the important challenge to policy makers is to help those men find a role in our society. Through voluntary work, many people can feel needed, they can contribute and they can recover a sense of belonging. Through voluntary work, their self-esteem and self-confidence can be restored. They can develop practical skills, after which they will find new opportunities for themselves.

I agree very much with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who said in a speech at the beginning of February:

"I believe we must do more to recognise, support and encourage the habit of volunteering, which cements together our society and is one of the great glories of our national life."

That means strengthening volunteer bureaux such as the excellent one in Stratford-on-Avon, and although it is a delicate and sensitive task for Government, they must do what they can to assist the development of neighbourhood networks of volunteering. If we can do that, we shall provide opportunity for many people for whom we ought to find opportunity, and we shall strengthen the bonds of our society. It is interesting to note that, a month after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's speech, President Clinton announced his scheme for national voluntary service in the United States.

On 2 March, I asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister whether the Government would

"look systematically to identify and eliminate obstacles which at present discourage voluntary work and charitable activity, including aspects of eligibility for both unemployment benefit and invalidity benefit". [*Official Report*, 2 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 135.]

Shortly after that, I was glad to be one of the sponsors of an all-party early-day motion, No. 1597, which asks the Government to change the availability-for-work regulations to allow a volunteer seven days in which to give up a voluntary position, to alter the regulations for out-of-pocket expenses, to allow unemployed people to attend voluntary work camps throughout the European Community as well as in the United Kingdom, and to require those who advise benefits claimants to use discretion to encourage volunteering and not to limit it.

I do not have in mind—nor, I believe, do the other signatories to the motion—a scheme of compulsory workfare. What we are thinking of is encouraging those who want to give back to society in exchange for the support that they have received. I put it to my right hon. Friend the Minister that that is complementary in its spirit to the citizens charter, which properly insists on the rights of individuals. We need equally new emphasis on the obligations of the citizen.

In reality, we have no option but to proceed towards decentralisation, to diversification, to partnership and to enhancement of the role of voluntary work and charities. The age of centralised bureaucratic government is passing. We live in a society in which information is disseminated instantly and in which our citizens are educated, confident and insist on their independence. In any case, we are driven in this direction by a fiscal imperative: it is no longer possible, if ever it was, for Government simply to raise more and spend more.

We are all aware at the same time of the growing demands in our society for better quality services and for new varieties of services, such as the hospices that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) mentioned. We therefore have no option but to find new ways of meeting social need. The role of Government is to mobilise the resources of society, to empower and to provide incentives.

In that process, I have no doubt that local government must play a major part and must be welcomed in its role. If we ask for neighbourliness we must certainly respect and encourage the sense of local community. For the purposes of my argument it does not matter whether local government is controlled by the Conservative party, the Labour party or the Liberal Democratic party, but I am sure that we need flourishing local communities able to express themselves and to pursue their aspirations through the institutions of local government.

That sense of local community will be expressed not only through local government but through an abundance of local voluntary organisations and local enterprises all working in partnership. What I advocate certainly does not entail any abandonment of responsibility by central Government, who should use their leverage to shape local and private decisions so as to enable us better to pursue our social goals.

Much of what I have described is already happening. Care in the community is a conspicuous instance. The Government have been right to entrust the lead responsibility for care in the community to local authority social services departments, but it is also right that social services departments should not seek to do everything directly themselves through bureaucratic provision. Central and local government are taking charities into a new and much more formal partnership in social provision. That makes it incumbent upon us to think clearly about the role of charities and about what the impact on them of this new dispensation may be.

For example, before 1 April 1993, residential care was frequently provided by charities and paid for by residents subsidised by public funds from the Department of Social Security. Since that date, when funding was transferred from the Department to local authorities, charities have been contracted to become part of a publicly provided service. I accept that change, but let us be clear that it is a change of profound and far-reaching importance to charities. We will need to observe carefully the impact of the new dispensation on the nature of charitable activity and motivation.

That makes it all the more important to distinguish between funding charities through grant or fee to perform contractual functions, and supporting charities through fiscal relief to enable them to use their own initiative for the betterment of society. Both those roles for charities are essential. However, the latter—the encouragement of charities to use their own initiative and entrepreneurial energy for the betterment of society—needs sensitive consideration, given the difficult financial climate that they have had to face. The difficulties are well documented in the Charities Aid Foundation report, "Charities in Recession".

As other hon. Members have said, during the recession there has been a decline in voluntary giving and a falling away of the income of charities. Public expenditure constraints have meant that local authorities are less well placed to direct funds towards charities. We must also consider what the impact of the Government's decision on the urban programme may be. There are further uncertainties about the future of city challenge. I hope that city challenge will have an important part to play in future policy because it seems to be one of the most creative means of mobilising the resources of the community that we have yet seen deployed in this country.

I welcome the clause, and the proposed improvements to the gift aid scheme and to payroll giving. There is an argument, to which my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General referred, that if the limit of gift aid is reduced there will probably be a falling off in the number of covenants made. That is a valid fear, but it is also fair to note that for many years charities lobbied for what was called the single-year covenant, so perhaps they do not have absolute grounds for complaint.

I have to say—and I say it with sadness—that on balance this Budget disadvantages charities. It might be said that that is no great surprise. Charities are a huge presence in our national life and in our economy. In 1990, there were 171,434 registered charities with income in the order of £17 billion or more than 3 per cent. of gross domestic product. Charities employ at least 200,000 paid staff and there are about 1 million charitable trustees in our society. Perhaps, therefore, it is inevitable that, in a year when the Government are bound to raise taxes, charities will have to bear some of the brunt. Indeed, it would be difficult to exempt them entirely. All the same, I greatly regret the fact that charities are being asked to face an increased VAT burden, and I regret that the impact of the change in advance corporation tax, notwithstanding the transitional relief, seem certain to be so detrimental.

I ask the Government to stand back and consider the overall, net impact of their policies. It is worth asking whether, even at a time when general taxation has to increase, it is appropriate to increase the burden of taxes on charities. Charities should not be compared with private individuals or companies. As I have said, the Government are asking them to play an increased role in social provision. For all the reasons that I have sought to explain, the Government need charities, and my right hon. Friends should consider carefully the consequences of simultaneously reducing the resources available to them.

We must contemplate not only the measures in the Bill but, for example, the impact of the council tax on certain charities. Most residential homes run by charities have in the past been exempt from rates, but charities are not entitled to an exemption from the property element which represents 50 per cent. of the council tax. Transitional relief is being provided, but the Leonard Cheshire Foundation estimates that after the transition the change will cost it £210,000 a year. That aspect of the council tax will also be a disincentive to charities to subdivide their larger homes into smaller, homelier residential units, which would otherwise be desirable for care in the community.

We must also bear in mind the impact of the national lottery, which will inevitably divert some money from charitable giving. Although it is not properly the subject of today's debate, I hope that my right hon. Friend will be willing to contemplate an amendment to the Bill so that instead of a 12 per cent. tax being imposed on lottery ticket sales, winnings would be taxed so as to enable a larger proportion of the money spent on the lottery to go to good causes.

It is important to examine the overall impact on the charitable sector of the policies simultaneously being pursued by the Government.

I would not vote for the amendment and I am not even sure whether the hon. Member for Peckham will invite me to do so. None the less, it has provided a useful opportunity for debate, although we all know that, if carried, its practical effect would be relatively trivial in the context of the larger issues that we have discussed.

I ask my right hon. Friends in government to develop in the range of their policy making a clearer and more consistent concept of what they are asking of charities, and to ensure that an appropriate range of supportive fiscal policies is in place.

8.30 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson: My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) made a splendid, wide-ranging speech about the impact of charities on people who give, on people who help and on people who receive help. That veritable tour de force by the chairman of the all-party group on charities was a wonderful speech to listen to and I am grateful to be allowed to follow it, although I shall employ a slightly different mode of thinking.

We are debating how charities are funded and where the funds are found. As a derivative of that discussion, we have strayed into the subject of what work charities perform. We have also talked a little about what we believe charities should contribute to our society's social welfare and educational structure. The two small planks on which the whole discussion has been built are the ways of giving to charity—gift aid and payroll giving. I refer to them as small planks because the enormity of charitable giving outstrips them by far.

I am glad that a number of hon. Members have commented on various ways of giving. I stress that payroll giving can never be the largest source of income for a charity. Opposition Members who have talked about payroll giving as if it were something that could transform a charity's income may have been misleading themselves. That was never the intention.

Payroll giving was started in 1947 by a Jewish charity called Children and Youth Aliyah—the British arm of a Zionist movement. The charity was set up to raise funds to settle Jewish children from various countries in Israel. It was formed by people who had small factories. In order to get their staff and their families—these were often family businesses—to contribute, payroll deductions were started.

There was a link-up with the Save the Children Fund at about that time and the two charities ran the scheme together. For many years they were the only charities to do this. It was a combined operation. Why only two charities? Because it is a very labour-intensive scheme to run. A very large number of people are being asked for small sums of money. To make payroll giving effective at that time, a factory's entire work force had to agree to give. Otherwise it would not have been worth the effort of the payroll clerks, cost accountants and finance directors. This was a very difficult type of fund-raising to run. It depended heavily on organisers going in and persuading people on the shop floor to give.

Now that the Government have stepped in, the situation is much easier. Payroll giving has been transformed into an eminently possible source of funding, albeit still on a relatively small scale. It is on a small scale because people are being invited to contribute regularly from their pay. They have to make a personal commitment. However, the system is infinitely easier now that the Government have stepped in and made it possible to do things which we in the Save the Children Fund did with such difficulty for so many years.

Gift aid is wonderful, but it will never be the largest source of charitable giving. By far the largest source of charitable giving in this country is events to raise money. Indeed, I hate to tell hon. Members that the preferred United Kingdom means of raising funds is jumble sales. People love to give a little while they enjoy some activity. British people give with a sense of fun and merriment to causes that meet needs which are sometimes of deep social and personal significance. This is particularly true of overseas causes.

Some years ago the classic model of a charitable giver was a middle-aged lady—a churchgoer or someone who attended the synagogue regularly or went to the mosque. One would encounter a high proportion of widowed people and quite a high proportion of professional people. Those who went to church tended to give to one special charity, with two runners-up; those who went to the synagogue gave regularly to 25 charities; those who went to the mosque were involved in quite a wide spread of charitable giving.

I do not wish to attribute to the Government a greater impact upon the charity world than has taken place, but, from my own substantial experience in this field, I have to suggest that the Government have transformed the donor profile. Consider Comic Relief and the way in which younger people are now contributing so much more. There is a wider variety of options for giving, and this year's Budget reflects two small but significant methods that the Government have pioneered. A much broader section of the population is now involved in charitable giving.

Contrary to what several Opposition Members have said, the United Kingdom is exceptionally generous in its giving. The generosity is shown both by individuals and by the Government. We are tenth in the league of donors internationally, and as individuals we are second or third. Britain has always been a profoundly generous nation. It has always been generous to people in need, both at home and overseas. In the recession the income of some charities has indeed gone down, but it should be borne in mind that the income of some has increased. That applies to many overseas aid organisations.

It is not too far-fetched to suggest that British givers put their money where they see the greatest need. Perhaps they have not been giving quite so generously to some charities that operate in the domestic field as they are aware of the greater state provision. Despite all the talk about cuts, I am aware that some national health service figures are going through the ceiling. The same thing applies to social services provision—what Opposition Members refer to as the welfare state. Is it possible that British donors believe that their money is better targeted to areas where there is little or no state provision? Is it possible that they wish to leave to the state those areas where the state is making full, rich and complex provision?

It is difficult for the Opposition—particularly for the Labour party, with its desire for total state provision—to accept that charities have a real and continuing part to play. I do not for one moment doubt the generosity of

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

many individual Opposition Members. Indeed, some of them have assisted my own small initiatives to help the helpless. I know how tough the situation is. Opposition Members talk about a pioneering role for charities. A pioneering role is one thing, but the continuation of provision is surely also a proper function of charities in our most modern of welfare states. There are many actions in which the state should not get involved.

Take Relate as an example. People who are helped by that organisation do not say that the Government should take it over, that provision should be made by the state, and that the welfare state should be tampering with their marital breakdowns or personal-relationship difficulties. What the public ask is that the Government continue to fund Relate generously and regularly so that this voluntary, or quasi-voluntary, organisation may continue its work. I am referring not to its pioneering work but to its continuing work. Meals on Wheels is much more old-fashioned, but is still valuable. The Government fund it, but nobody suggests that they should take it over and deliver the meals, depriving people of the love and care that come with the service.

I suggest that charities have a continuing role, woven into the weft and warp of our social services and our health and education provision.

I am one of the two founders of a charity called Cities in Schools. It is an odd title which came about because Mrs. Carter read it back to front; it was meant to be "Schools in Cities". It is a new initiative, based on a United States model which we have converted to a United Kingdom perspective. It is non-political, as is proper for charitable efforts, and targets truancy.

I do not believe that we will have a pioneering role which will enable us to work ourselves out of a job. We are helping children back into mainstream education in Cardiff, Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets and other places. Our uniqueness is that we are not a Government body but a voluntary organisation. Cities in Schools involves a mixture of volunteering, enthusiasm and professionalism, and is backed by the local community, the educational system and local businesses.

That brings me to another point about charitable giving. It is measurable not just in money, although that is a terrible thing to say with the Financial Secretary sitting in front of me. Cash is an enabler, but there are other forms of giving. Burger King assists Cities in Schools in the provision of buildings. Other companies give major gifts in expertise, management and work experience. The Opposition do not much like business involvement in charities, but that is the way to turn young lives away from truancy and bring them back into the main stream. Why do I think that our work will continue? Because I do not believe that truancy will stop tomorrow or that the heavy hand of the state can have the same effect on those youngsters as we can.

Charitable effort is a continuation of the work that so many of our forebears did historically before the welfare state came into existence. The United Kingdom has a wonderful inheritance of charitable work. We heard a reference to 171,000-plus registered charities, but there must be just as many which are not registered and which carry on a great deal of work. Many of them are very small and have no staff. Many are funded completely voluntarily and do not obtain money from Government.

How very different their perspective is from that of the larger charities, the top 400, which are so often quoted as the charitable world because the Charities Aid Foundation takes their income, expenditure and style of activity as the norm. It is not the norm. Their expenditure on advertising, salaries and cars, for example, is beyond the norm. Most charities are run very economically and are very much smaller. In most cases their efforts are overlooked.

We have strayed a long way in the debate from gift aid and payroll giving, but that straying has been thoughtful and should encourage the Government to continue thinking of ways to assist the work of voluntary organisation. I make no apology for talking around the profile of the giver and the way in which the work of charities enlarges the work of the state. Those points were raised by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in her criticism of the initiative by the Government. It is right and proper that we should respond to her.

I pay tribute to the great generosity of the British people in their giving. I thank the Government for the many ways in which they have made giving more attractive for donors in recent years. In the past couple of years, I have raised £3 million to £4 million and I never fail to be astonished at the imagination and sensitivity of people in recognising need and in giving time, professionalism, expertise and money. Again I thank the Government for making it easier for donors to be generous.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 67 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 115

FIRST YEAR ALLOWANCES: MACHINERY AND PLANT

8.45 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I beg to move amendment No. 37, page 84, line 15, leave out 'subsection', and insert 'subsections'.

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. John McWilliam): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 38, in page 84, line 23, at end insert—

'"(3C) This section applies to so much of any expenditure as is incurred by a person carrying on a trade, on the provision of a ship.".'.

May I remind the Committee, because it is a Committee, that charity is finished with and that the Chair resumes normal service? Hon. Members must speak to the amendments before the Committee.

Sir Giles Shaw: The amendment is not unworthy. On the contrary, those who have taken an interest in the extremely gloomy and prolonged decline in the British marine fleet and the shipping industry are bringing the issue correctly to the centre of the Government's policy making, which is the Budget. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is in his place because these issues must be addressed carefully, urgently and in a constructive and effective way.

It is common knowledge in the Committee that the decline in the shipping industry has been profound. The purpose of tabling the amendment was, first, that the industry is in a parlous position and requires specific action. Secondly, it is to increase capital allowances to

100 per cent. so that there may be some encouragement for the building and replacement of ships. Thirdly, through my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, I point out to the Government and particularly the Department of Trade and Industry that time is fast running out, and that unless the Government act in fairly short order it will be too late to make any constructive and long-lasting change to the irreparable decline.

As to the shipping industry itself, the United Kingdom maritime fleet is No. 33 on the world list. That of itself is a miserable statement. I understand that on the latest register there are only 425 vessels, with a gross registered tonnage of only 3·4 million tonnes. The decline has been steady, protracted and virtually unerring in ratio, so that one can reasonably plot that by 2010 the British shipping industry will have disappeared. It was because of that order of magnitude of decline that we decided to table the amendment. It is essential that action is taken now. That is particularly so when the demand for shipping is growing at 4 per cent. per annum. One cannot complain that there is not a market in which to compete and a need for good, efficient and effective shipping.

The need for a British shipping industry has been firmly established; no words of mine are needed to add to the good causes which we should now pray in aid. It is essential for a trading nation to have an effective shipping and marine industry. It is essential for an international trading nation to have it on a scale that allows international competition to be met. It is essential for a nation that has significant overseas committments and has had the capacity in recent times to require logistic support for defence needs to maintain that capacity.

The second area of need relates to the fact that the British marine shipping industry and ships are now aging rapidly. The average age of British ships is about 16 years. With that increased life comes not only the need to repair and restore, but increased inefficiency. Modern technology being what it is, it is now posible to find engines which are much more effective, run on less fuel, provide more power and are more mobile and useful in every possible way. So with the decline and ageing come higher costs through inefficient operating levels. Thus it is that, according to the Chamber of Shipping, it is a requirement that some three quarters of the British fleet be replaced by the year 2000. The need is established in fairly clear terms.

The requirement of replacment brings with it a consequential benefit for British shipbuilders. I need hardly remind my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, on a day which has seen a question and answer on the subject of Swan Hunter, of the vital importance of providing for increased orders for shipbuilders. Certainly, at least half the orders required to modernise the fleet up to the standards required will be placed with British suppliers.

Having set out the need and the background of decline, let me come to the specifics. What should be done? My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will note that the amendment deals with capital allowance—a well-accepted system, widely practised and clearly a Government favourite, because in the Budget there is increased provision for capital allowance for industrial investment. There is no doubt that this is, in the Government's view, a satisfactory mechanism through which to deal with investment, and investment in the industry is certainly required.

It therefore does not seem illogical that, if there is an industry that needs special care and attention—not charity, but special care and attention—the instrument of capital allowance is a reasonable one to select. That is the purpose of the amendment. The Government are committed to produce, through this Budget, a budget for industry. The British shipping industry, which is surely within that compass, also requires special care and attention.

Over the years, the Government have been extremely generous in providing a wide range of assistances—if I can use that word—to various industries. If businesses come from outside this country, grants are available if they locate in certain places. Regional grants are available in some areas and in areas of decline substantial grants are available through various measures introduced by the Government and applied through the Treasury or the Department of the Environment. Regional aid, relocation grants and development grants come into this. There is the Urban Development Corporation, for example, introduced to provide special initiatives using Government funds to help establish new industries.

There are also enterprise zones, introduced, as I recall it, to provide a zone in which there would be significant tax relief for the establishment of certain industries. On the grand scale, this Government, as many predecessors on both sides of the Committee would agree, have been hugely supportive of agriculture and of major public industries, into which the coal industry assuredly fits, with the massive support that it has enjoyed over the years in connection with its indebtedness.

So there is no shortage of information that leads us to believe that the Government have looked at industrial problems and used taxpayers' money to help relieve them.

It is against that background, therefore, that I claim that the amendment is relevant to the kind of policy that the Government should be adopting at this time for the industries which they select. If there is to be a significant improvement in the profile for British shipping, it is vital that the Government find the appropriate mechanism to ensure just that.

One idea that the industry has is the creation of a maritime enterprise zone in which a scheme would be provided which might be attractive to my hon. Friend because it would be ring-fenced. He often finds that simple additions of aid or altering the tax allowance on the capital grant is difficult to operate. The maritime enterprise zone, however, would be unique to the needs of British shipping and could provide a formula worth looking at and applying.

If, through the capital investment proposal that we lay before the Committee or the maritime zone, there were a significant improvement in the industry's prospects, what benefit would that bring? The answer is significant economic return. There is little doubt that the amendment, if applied, could, according to the Chamber of Shipping, stabilise the position of the fleet within five years. And, if it were accompanied by investment over a period of time in new and more effective and competitive ships, the fleet could be stabilised in five years and the average age could probably be reduced from 16 to 10 years. Over 10 years, perhaps, the fleet could be increased by some 40 per cent. by volume.

All this would bring huge benefits to our economy. Overseas trading and earnings and the international commitment to shipping which this country has for

[Sir Giles Shaw]

generations established would grow and with them the marine engineering industries and many related industries would flourish.

The case is made out for taking some action to assist the industry at a point at which it would appear to be entering a phase of decline that will be terminal unless action is taken.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the estimate of the British Chamber of Shipping that unless the Government take urgent action there will be no merchant fleet left by the time of the next general election?

Sir Giles Shaw: Had the hon. Lady heard my opening remarks, she would have heard me say that by the year 2000 the merchant fleet will have declined to virtually nothing.

Ideally, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept the amendment for action now as it would be consistent with the mechanism of the investment allowance and the measures in the Budget for industrial investment in general. If my hon. Friend is not so minded, I press him to consider the matter and, with the agreement of the industry, work out a plan which, in his eyes, will be effective to do the job, because it has to be done.

If simple allowances are not satisfactory, we must come back to the House with a scheme that will provide for recovery, refurbishment and reinvestment to produce a greater, more competitive and more efficient maritime service than that which we presently enjoy.

The clause is of real and crucial importance to the industry, which does not in its own right require any charitable treatment, but which is a quintessential industry. It is one of the few industries that one can isolate and say that an island nation demands an adequate, properly staffed and efficient merchant marine.

9 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I support the amendments because they will help the shipping industry and the shipbuilding industry. I should like to concentrate on their possible impact on the shipbuilding industry.

The economic arguments in favour of the amendments are convincing and the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) put them effectively. He referred to many strong economic and commercial arguments in favour of the clauses, and I shall not detain the Committee by repeating them.

I was not in the Chamber at the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I apologise for that, but I assume that he has also made the strategic case for increasing the size of the United Kingdom merchant fleet, which has a significant role in commercial activities and in the security and defence of the nation.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the significance of the shipping industry to the commercial health of the nation. The Committee should be aware of the major contribution that the industry has made over many years. However, in the past five or six years the situation has become extremely serious. The number of United Kingdom registered ships has halved in the past seven years and our merchant fleet now ranks 33rd in the world, behind countries such as Cyprus and the Bahamas, as hon. Members will be surprised to discover. That is serious for Britain's strategic place as a maritime nation that relies heavily on the activities of its merchant fleet.

I want to mention the importance of these measures to the health of Britain's shipbuilding industry. In the past few days, there has been a major threat to one of the finest shipyards in the country. It is incumbent on the Government to take a strategic overview of Britain's shipbuilding industry.

The hon. Member for Pudsey drew attention to the importance of renewing Britain's merchant fleet. I speak for all my hon. Friends when I say that that is an urgent imperative.

It is no longer an option for the Government to do nothing about what is happening to our maritime industry. As a country we depend on our maritime industry, in particular the British shipbuilding industry, which has been decimated in the past three years by the Government's failure to consider the importance of those industries to the health or the nation.

I find it depressing when Conservative Members, although there are not many present tonight, talk about the shipbuilding industry as representing yesterday's technology. That is a completely bogus contention. I invite any Conservative Member who wants to experience at first hand the strength of the technological base of Britain's shipbuilding industry to come to my constituency and see the investment that has been made in the shipyard in Barrow and the quality of the engineering work that is carried out.

There is evidence of that high-quality work in every shipyard in the country, on the Clyde and on the Tyne. If hon. Members want to see the quality of the work on the Tyne, they had better get there quickly, because the decisions that the Government have taken have left the shipbuilding workers on the Tyne cruelly exposed to a decimating future of unemployment.

I should like a sign that Conservative Members will show some imagination, which is rather a lot to expect from some of them, about the growing scale of the problem faced by many shipbuilding workers who have served the nation incredibly well over many years and deserve better.

The shipbuilding industry, in particular, looks to the Government to give some indication that they are aware not only of the contribution that the industry has made in the past, but of the contribution that it can and should be allowed to make in the future. The merchant fleet lies at the core of the argument. We accept that the volume of naval work will inevitably decline, but the same cannot be said of our Merchant Navy.

Although we face stiff competition from the far east and the Pacific rim—with which we need to deal—we should not simply throw up our hands and say that we can make no decision to help the British shipbuilding industry to survive into the next century. We can make such decisions, but we must recognise that inaction is not an option: failure to act would decimate employment opportunities all over the country.

The hon. Member for Pudsey spoke of the importance of the merchant fleet, and rightly drew our attention to the increasing age of that fleet. The average age of British merchant vessels is now over 16 years. The need for replacements is urgent, and the best way of providing them is to place orders with British shipyards. Perhaps the most excellent contribution that our British shipyards can make

is in the design and building of clever, high-tech cargo vessels—vessels that will be needed in the future to carry specialised products around the world. The hon. Member for Pudsey mentioned the expectation that world trade will continue to increase. We need to ensure that British shipbuilding, and the British shipping industry, can contribute to and share in that increase.

I urge the Committee to support the amendment, on which I hope we shall be able to vote. We need to test the backing of the Committee not only for the future of Britain's shipping industry—which has made a strong contribution to the commercial health of the nation over many decades—but for the desperate need to alleviate the chronic mass unemployment that now affects many shipbuilding communities.

Sir Terence Higgins: I spent the first seven years of my working life in the shipping industry, and qualified as a member of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers. At that time, the British shipping industry was at the forefront of world trade in terms of both liner trade and tramp shipping. Since then, there have been massive technological changes in the form of roll-on/roll-off ships, the development of container vessels and so forth; but—alas—there has also been a huge decline in the size of the British register and the scale of British shipowning.

I believe that, at an early stage, British ship owners were too confident of their own abilities. They thought that they could compete regardless of whether other countries' owners were receiving huge subsidies from their Governments. That went on for some time, and the British register declined. By the time British ship owners had realised that they could not win such an unfair contest, it had become difficult to obtain Government support.

Across the world—here I differ somewhat from the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton)—Governments subsidised shipbuilding rather than ensuring that they had competitive shipowners. The result was massive over capacity, with ships being mothballed and—in some cases—being built and then never going to sea before finally being scrapped. The balance between shipowning and shipbuilding has been unfair and wrong—although, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the amendment would help both to some extent.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is very keen on talking about level playing fields. It should be recognised that some playing fields are very difficult to level; that certainly applies to international subsidies, especially shipowning subsidies. The Chamber of Shipping has made it clear that it is behind the Government in seeking to get rid of subsidies across the board; meanwhile, however, something must be done to help those involved. That is the reason for the amendment on which my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) has expounded so eloquently.

The fact is that, when it comes to level playing fields, the Chancellor has already conceded that there are some situations in which it is necessary to have special help, as exemplified by enterprise zones and the 100 per cent. investment allowance which, in essence, is what my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey argues ought to be extended to the shipping industry. So there is no great point of principle here which has not already been conceded by the Treasury.

There is, however, as I know from my own experience, always some danger, as far as the Treasury is concerned, that this will open the floodgates and that further appeals of this sort will be made. The Treasury will ask whether it is possible to ring-fence the particular thing for which hon. Members are putting forward a case. It is clear to me that the shipping industry is more an international market than any other that one can think of and that it is different from petroleum refining or the chemical industry which, we are told, would immediately apply for this kind of grant.

It is particularly appropriate that my hon. Friend should have moved the amendment in the way that he did, because much of the problem with shipping is that one must invest in a very large lump of equipment at one go and this makes it difficult to raise the necessary amount of money in one go. That is why it is so much easier to do so if one has a front-end-loaded investment allowance.

It is not necessary for me to go into the importance of invisible earnings, but despite their importance they too have been declining, particularly with regard to the insurance industry, for example, and to the role of the City generally. Much of the strength of the City, however, has always been based on the fact that we have been a major shipping nation, so this measure will help not only the shipping industry but also the position of London as an international centre.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I have listened to my right hon. Friend's comments with interest and in total agreement. He has covered the strategic aspects of shipping. Can he find time to say a word about the important defence implications? We are an island nation with responsibilities worldwide and we rely on having our own merchant fleet to carry out some of those responsibilities.

Sir Terence Higgins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This matter has been debated in the House on a number of occasions and it is exemplified particularly by national defence, which is very important, so I agree very much with what he says.

Turning to the question of cost, there seems to be considerable confusion about the figures. The effect of this amendment is entirely to work through cash flow. The cost to the Government will simply be the cost of financing the reduction of the tax revenues in the early years until such time as the tax revenues increase in the later years of the asset's life. There is no grant as such—merely a cash flow problem—and the cost of financing that cash flow in the intervening time. That profile is very desirable in some ways in the first years because we are at present in a deep recession and the need for raising revenue will increase as the recession ends and the economy is eventually in danger of overheating.

Over the kind of time scale that we are talking of in this amendment, that pattern of cash flow could be quite appropriate. Eventually, if the level of investment is maintained, the cash flow reaches equilibrium and one would not see any great variation over time.

The crucial point, therefore, is what the cost is, and this is where I have some trouble. I have discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary and, more briefly, with the Chancellor. The figures that they are bandying around of the cost of the amendment seem to be far in excess of those that the Chamber of Shipping is estimating. We must take the question of costs into

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account and it is very important that we should sort out this contradiction and, if necessary, return to the matter on Report so that we can go into it in greater depth.

These figures still seem unresolved, but my understanding from the Chamber of Shipping is that the average cost for each year of investment over, say, five years is likely to be £20 million or £30 million. That is not at all unrealistic for the Treasury, given the benefits which are likely to accrue. As I have already said, it is effectively what is the discounted cash flow, the net present value of the interest forgone over the period when the tax will work its way through. It is not, of course, on the whole of the investment, because we already have an investment allowance of 25 per cent., as I understand it. It is the difference between 25 per cent. and 100 per cent.

9.15 pm

I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will either accept the figures that the Chamber of Shipping has put forward, which I believe to be correct, or give a very clear undertaking that he is prepared to reconcile them and discuss the matter in much greater depth with a view to accepting the proposals made once this point has been sorted out. But, of course, I am talking of the gross cost.

The net cost to the Exchequer is likely over time to be much less, because we have here an investment in new ships. The British register is getting very old. It is inefficient in comparison with newer vessels. Consequently, if it changes from old vessels to new, that in itself, with no change in the level of demand worldwide, is likely to increase the profitability of the companies concerned and in turn the revenue that the Treasury derives. Therefore, there is a net increase in the revenue that the Treasury is likely to get over time with regard to this series of assets.

I understand that, if the register goes on declining at the present rate, it will disappear altogether by 2010. But the ships on the British register may disappear even by the time of the next general election, which we hope is a long way off. Therefore, this is something that cannot be deferred indefinitely, even if some time is needed to sort out the precise figures and exactly what needs to be done, because it is abundantly clear that something needs to be done with regard to the British shipping industry.

I believe that the proposals the industry puts forward to limit this arrangement for, say, a five-year period while negotiations on reducing unfair competition worldwide can continue are in essence very moderate. The cost anyway depends only on there actually being investments, except in a very trivial amount; it is only if the companies invest that there is any deferment, even, of taxation.

Surely more investment is fundamentally what we need. Certainly, for the balance of payments it is very important. As the economy recovers, the balance of payments will clearly become an increasing rather than a diminishing problem.

For all those reasons, I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary can give a sympathetic response. I believe that I am right in saying that in the past he has made some speeches not dissimilar from the one that I am now delivering, and therefore it is not unreasonable to hope that we shall receive a sympathetic response from him this evening and that at the very least we shall return to this matter very soon—as soon as we can sort out the figures. I believe that the Chamber's figures are right and that the case for the amendments and assistance for the industry is very strong.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I shall speak briefly in support of the amendment, which was moved strongly by the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who told us that the scale of decline of the British shipping industry was such that we were now 33rd in the world. The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) recalled a time when we were first and foremost in the world. Even as recently as 13 years ago we ranked fourth in the world, so the decline has been very speedy.

Over the same period, the shipping industry's contribution to the balance of payments has halved. The Chamber of Shipping has said that in the past two years over 17 companies have crewed out, flagged out or folded.

I underline the comments about the need for the Government to act urgently now. Whatever the precise date of the ultimate collapse—whether by the next general election, by the year 2000 or even by the year 2010—there is clearly a desperate worry which is closing in on us quickly. We can all agree that thousands of jobs would go, that there would be an implication for the balance of payments and that there would be knock-on effect on the shipbuilding industry and on many other industries. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) spoke with an obvious constituency interest in the future of shipbuilding. On a very much smaller scale, I have constituents who cross the River Torridge to work at the Appledore shipyard.

The relative decline in the British shipping industry must have something to do with the unequal tax treatment of the shipping industry in various countries. I echo the words of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). The Liberal Democrats would like there to be a concentration on getting other countries to remove the advantages that they are giving. However, we must be realistic. That process will take time. Even within the European Community, decision-making is slow, and we must remember that many of the key players are not members of the European Community.

We must be realistic about the time that the process will take, and we must see the matter in the context of the urgency of our problem. In the meantime, it is essential for the Government to do someting about the problem. If they act too late, the whole industry will be gone. It must be appropriate for the Government to intervene. When other countries have done so, their shipping industries have responded and have improved—America and Japan being two of the most recent examples.

I have no way of knowing whether the Government's estimates of what the proposal would cost are right, or whether the estimates by the Chamber of Shipping are more likely to be right. We must cost the proposals and the benefits that would accrue from them. We have already heard that the shipping industry internationally is expanding.

In the context of the widespread concern in the industry and among the public about the practice of flags of convenience, especially in the wake of the Braer disaster, the shipping industry in Britain must be in a strong position, with its reputation for being modern, efficient and safe. It needs the aid that the amendment offers to take advantage of that opportunity. The fleet could easily

double if it was given such assistance. Whatever the cost, there would surely be a long-term gain, even to the Revenue.

As has been said, the Government recognise various areas as needing special help, one example being regional enterprise initiatives. The right hon. Member for Worthing was right to point out that the enormous outlay on the purchase of a ship which must be made in the first year should be addressed through capital allowances at the same time, rather than being forced to be written off over nine years, as is the present arrangement. The Government may wonder whether they can afford to accept the amendment. I simply ask whether they can afford not to. The impact on industry would be immediate and dramatic. In five years, the average age of the fleet could have halved. Earnings would have increased, employment would have expanded and the Government would have benefited through an improved contribution to the balance of payments.

The right hon. Member for Worthing was too modest in his anticipation of what the proposal might mean in terms of tax revenue. If we forecast far enough forward, we can see that it would bring a gain to the Revenue and that it would also make a contribution to our defence capability, as other hon. Members have said. The amendment is well measured and I have pleasure in pledging my colleagues' support for it.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in support of the amendments. I declare an interest as a solicitor who has practised for many years in maritime matters. In my time as a maritime lawyer, I have witnessed a steady decline in the British merchant fleet and in its position in the world. Other colleagues, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), have eloquently explained the importance of British shipping to this country. The industry contributes £2·3 billion net a year. It employs about 20,000 seafarers and a further 30,000 ashore.

It is important to have this debate again this year because, as has been explained with great detail and eloquence, it will be unnecessary and academic in a few years' time because the British merchant fleet will no longer exist. If one takes a straight line extrapolation, at its present rate of attrition, the fleet will effectively have disappeared by the year 2010.

The shipping industry is emphatically not a smokestack industry that is simply looking for handouts. We have already heard at some length about the level playing field difficulty, which applies to this industry more than most others, and the extent to which other countries, including some notable shipping nations in the European Community, provide favourable but unfair fiscal regimes for their ship owners and operators. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing said, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is not unsympathetic to the British shipping and shipbuilding industry. If my hon. Friend feels that the amendments do not achieve the purpose for which they are intended, the Chamber of Shipping and other groups representing the British shipping industry will be more than happy to continue discussing other options.

The 40 per cent. first-year allowance is welcomed, but it is not enough. We must do everything that we can to give our shipowners the sort of competitive edge that other countries have given their shipowners. The intent of the amendments has been explained, as one might expect, with great skill by a former Treasury Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing. He said that the benefits could end up as more or less self-financing and the real net cost for each year of investment would range between possibly £20 million and £30 million.

If there is a genuine difference of opinion between Treasury officials and Chamber of Shipping officials about those figures, let them continue the discussion and debate. Naturally, the figures are based on certain assumptions. Essentially, they expect the current level of ordering—about 34 ships—to double. That also takes into account another possible amendment to the Budget relating to roll-over relief, but I will not refer to that amendment in this debate.

There are many arguments why the British merchant fleet needs help. We have heard the important arguments about the balance of payments and the strategic and defence issues. I shall concentrate on only one argument on which I can speak with considerable personal knowledge—the contribution of related activities to shipping, especially in the City of London.

Apart from the contribution made by British shipping in carrying not only our goods but those of other nations across the seas, the other activities to which I refer earn a further £1·5 billion net for the balance of payments. In the City of London, we take care of more than half the world's marine insurance, protection and indemnity coverage, chartering and cargo broking, ship finance and management, arbitration, law and consultancy services, the classification societies and so on.

Recently, we have had debates in the House about the importance of the commercial court in London in terms of attracting litigants from abroad. A substantial part of the business of that court derives from London's reputation as the prime maritime centre in the world. I know from personal experience that other centres, such as New York, Piraeus and so on, cannot come close to challenging the pre-eminence of London in this field.

One of the most dramatic statistics is that the number of British seafarers is shrinking alarmingly—there may be only 5,000 active officers by the year 2000. We need 1,300 new officer cadet entrants a year, yet we took only 343 in 1992. That means that fewer and fewer in due course will come ashore either to pass on their expertise to others or to enter the support and service sectors that I have described.

In other words, inevitably the shrinking of our national fleet will sooner or later have a knock-on effect on other important parts of the economy. How can we remain a leading maritime and financial centre when we are no longer truly a significant maritime nation? To take one example, how can we expect to influence the new international rules drawn up to combat the possibility of another Braer disaster around our shores if we are no longer a major player in the maritime world?

I urge my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to continue a dialogue with the British shipping industry and seize the unprecedented opportunity of two Budgets in one year to put the matter right—if not today, later this year.

9.30 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I support amendments Nos. 37 and 38, to which my name is attached. The amendments are designed to encourage the purchase of new ships by allowing those who order ships to take advantage of 100 per cent. capital allowances. I believe that the amendments can help to stimulate a much-needed renewal and expansion of the British maritime fleet, perhaps to the extent that the present level of ordering of about 34 new ships each year could be doubled.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) talked about the costs to the Revenue. It is obviously right that we should concentrate on that to some extent. I shall return to the figures that he mentioned later. It might assist the Economic Secretary in assessing the likely cost of the measures to the Revenue if he worked with the figure that I suggested—which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) also suggested. An assumption that the measure might double the ordering of ships—another 30-odd ships each year—is a reasonable basis on which the Economic Secretary might calculate the cost to the Revenue.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) set out in some detail the arguments for amendments Nos. 37 and 38. I shall endeavour to avoid repeating the statistics that have been set out clearly already. I might try to add one or two of my own.

It is clear that there has been an inexorable decline in both the United Kingdom-registered and United Kingdom-owned fleet. The figure that I find significant is that, in 1975, we had about 9 per cent. of the world total. That figure had declined by 1991 to a mere 1 per cent. Clearly, if that decline continues at that rate, the alarming conclusions which others have reached this evening that the fleet will disappear fairly quickly is inevitable.

The disappearance of the British merchant fleet was well discussed in a report by the Transport Select Committee as long ago as 1987. It set out several arguments for maintaining a United Kingdom-registered fleet, which follow on from the various speeches that have been made this evening.

The Select Committee talked about the impact on trade of a serious reduction in the fleet. It talked about the danger in both defence and economic terms of being entirely dependent on others to move the United Kingdom's imports and exports. That matter was referred to in an intervention. It has not so far been discussed in detail in the debate, but we should have regard to it.

The Select Committee referred also to the contribution made by shipping to the balance of payments. The Chamber of Shipping estimates that British shipping contributes some £4 billion gross to the United Kingdom's foreign earnings and £2·4 billion net. It comments that British shipping underpins the City maritime services, which earn more than £1·2 billion net abroad. That, obviously, was the observation made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

The figures for the balance of payments are a matter of great concern to the Committee at this stage in our deliberations. Clearly, we are looking at the Chancellor's proposals against the background of a serious balance of payments difficulty. If, in the context of these measures, we can improve that situation, even if it is a modest improvement, surely it should be welcomed.

Without repeating the various statistics that have already been given about the decline in the maritime fleet, it might be worth asking why that decline has taken place when other countries seem to have been able to stabilise their fleets and, in some cases, to increase them

All our major European competitors appear to have been able to establish attractive fiscal regimes that have encouraged investment in shipping. That is certainly the case in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Norway and Sweden. There has been a judicious use of tax incentives—not grants but a favourable fiscal environment, by means of which those countries have been able to reverse the decline in size of their fleets.

Not only have they been able to reverse the decline in size of the fleets—the numbers of ships—but, more importantly, with regard to the present problems of the United Kingdom maritime fleet, they have significantly improved the aid profile of their fleets. That is crucial where new technology is increasingly used, particularly to reduce operating costs for shipping.

It has been clearly said that one of the key problems faced by owners in the United Kingdom is that, as they are competing in a world market with higher technology vessels, they are caught in a situation in which their high operating costs and consequentially relatively low revenue means that they are, in effect, forced either to sell or to scrap their existing ships. The idea of the amendments is clearly to allow those fleets to be developed, to purchase new ships, so that we can more effectively compete in what is clearly a vigorous and competitive world market.

I said that I would return to the question of costs, which has already been covered in some detail by the right hon. Member for Worthing. I simply want to endorse the figures that he gave. The Chamber of Shipping has suggested that the scheme might cost about £70 million gross in the first year. Obviously, the cost of the scheme will depend on how successful it is, but if the net costs that the Chamber of Shipping has set out are between £20 million and £30 million a year, it is difficult to see how the Government can resist such a sensible approach for the United Kingdom shipping fleet.

When we are considering those costs, I invite the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and the Government to put on the scales the benefits to the Revenue that are likely to arise from the economic advantages that the country will derive from a renewed and expanded British maritime fleet. Clearly, if we have a more competitive fleet —that is the argument—a fleet that is newer, more effective and based on the use of high technology, it will contribute higher tax revenues to the Exchequer. It would be a consequential benefit to our balance of payments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) talked about the prospect of increased orders for ships and maritime equipment within the United Kingdom, and that clearly would be a consequence of the proposals. In addition, the hon. Member for Eastbourne talked about strengthening the United Kingdom's maritime services, particularly in the City of London. For all those reasons, we should support amendments Nos. 37 and 38 as a significant contribution to Britain's economic well-being.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate, which could not be described as anything other than thoroughly thoughtful and measured. I hope that my right

hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will take into account the concern, interest and determination of the Committee for a change in present policies.

When I last spoke on the issue in July, the debate focused on the defence implications of the decline in the British merchant fleet. As part of the justification for these amendments, hon. Members have already made that point. Nevertheless, I want to emphasise it again.

We are coming very close to the time when our defence strategy could be gravely at risk due to our inability to sealift our forces to where they are required in the world, because we do not have British flag vessels for that purpose. This argument has gone on for more than a decade.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) asked for a sympathetic reaction to the amendment from those who sit on the Treasury Bench. I, too, ask for a sympathetic reaction. I have little sympathy for the Government's position because of their inaction on this issue, despite repeated warnings from many hon. Members for many years about the dangers of the inexorable decline of the British merchant fleet.

I shall not re-emphasise how dangerous that decline is, other than to make the point that 10 years ago, on the eve of the Falklands war, the British flag fleet was 10 times larger that it is today. There has therefore been a dramatic drop over a decade. It must not continue. If it is not to continue, we need a change of policy. I am giving away no secrets when I say that the recently retired First Sea Lord has flagged up, as other senior naval officers have done over many years, the dangers, from the defence aspect, of allowing the decline to continue.

On that aspect, and as justification for the amendment, which we support, my view is that this is a classic case of pass the parcel between different Departments of State. The Ministry of Defence is concerned about the sealift issue. That was confirmed last summer by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. The Department of Transport is the sponsor Department for the industry, and the key to any resolution of the issue is the Treasury. It is Treasury Ministers whom I have firmly in my sights tonight. They hold the key to the resolution of this problem. They are friendly sights, but they are quite beady.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that part of our policy for recovery is to give a higher profile to manufacturing industry. That is the Prime Minister's commitment, but action has to follow words. Many other hon. Members suggested that this amendment would also have a beneficial effect on the shipbuilding industry, but in a thoroughly sensible way. It would not, as happened in the past, result in over-capacity. That point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins).

I emphasise, too, the key importance of what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) about the effect on invisibles that the rundown of the merchant fleet will have. As he said—I could not make this point more strongly in support of his argument—we cannot expect to maintain a viable City-linked, City-based shipping service if we do not have a shipping industry: the two go together. Many people who are involved in shipping in the City are effective in their jobs because they have seagoing experience, and we cannot have one without the other.

I want to be brief, and I do not want to labour points that have already been made. I emphasise to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary that I am looking for a commitment from him on a minimum of three things: first, that the Treasury is at last seized of the need to arrest the decline in the British merchant fleet; secondly, that he will give further consideration to the arguments that have been deployed tonight, and that we shall return to the issue on report; thirdly, that he and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will meet representatives of the industry to discuss these issues between now and Report. That is what I look for; it is the minimum that can give me satisfaction as I speak in support of the amendment so clearly moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey.

9.45 pm

Mr. David Shaw: I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on, I believe, his maiden shipping debate speech. Hon. Members who advocate the cause of British shipping welcome his joining our debates and the expertise and experience of the shipping industry that he will bring to bear on the issue.

I have, as many hon. Members will know, a strong constituency interest, and over the years my name has been attached to a number of amendments similar to this one. Indeed, I have had the honour of moving amendments to previous Finance Bills, and I advanced the case in an Adjournment debate last year.

The United Kingdom shipping industry is of much importance to this country; we cannot let it deline. Its recent decline accelerated under the previous Labour Government. We all recall Labour's subsidies for Polish ships and its support for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development code, which resulted in the British shipping industry not getting its fair share of the market. We also recall the Labour Government of 1974-79 trading with socialist countries that subsidised their shipbuilders. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) spoke of the socialist countries that had subsidised their shipping and shipbuilding industries.

The Government and the Conservative party saved the United Kingdom's car industry. We transformed the car industry, which was in terminal decline under Labour. Why cannot we now tackle the shipping industry? We rescued and rebuilt the car industry, and the time has come to rebuild British shipping.

Many jobs are at stake—not only the direct jobs on the ships and, in my constituency, on the ferries, but jobs in ports, in legal services, in ship brokers, in insurance, the lawyers, accountants and all the many other jobs that are directly and indirectly dependent on the industry. The Government could use this issue to show that they intend to tackle unemployment in London and the south-east. Unemployment in London is high compared with the rest of the country, and many of the jobs involved in the shipping industry are based in London and the south-east.

The amendment may call for 100 per cent. allowances, and the Government may be nervous that 100 per cent. would be excessive, but the answer is that surely we should go for some improvement on the present 25 per cent. writing-down allowance. The purpose of the amendment is to draw attention to the plight of the industry. Hon.

[Mr. David Shaw]

Members have already mentioned the age of the fleet, and that problem is getting worse. If nothing is done, there will be a significant reduction in the size of the fleet.

The Government have always had to recognise that there is a problem with the balance of payments if we have fixed exchange rates. We may now have floating exchange rates, but we still have a significant import bill, and shipping could play a major part in reducing the effect of those imports on our balance of payments. The importance of defence, and the fact that we still need a good merchant marine for defence purposes, have also been mentioned.

Why must we change capital allowances above all else? I have answered that question before and I shall answer it again. The Treasury must read the report of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York following the 1988 changes to capital allowances, which makes it clear that the United Kingdom is most competitive in many areas—that is why we get foreign investment here—but that capital allowances are the one factor on which we are not competitive.

The shift in capital allowances went too far in the wrong direction, and it is now necessary to reverse it. In his autumn statement, the Chancellor did reverse it, but for one year only. The shipping industry needs that change to be made permanent.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir. T. Higgins) said earlier, a ship represents enormous capital expenditure which, compared with expenditure in other industries, is out of all proportion in terms of the revenue earned. A ship is a very expensive item. The new ferries that P and O has introduced in my constituency cost nearly £100 million apiece. If we are to invest in such shipping and to create the jobs that result, we must recognise that the capital costs and the capital risks, that a businessman is asked to take are enormous.

We must recognise that the cash expenditure and the tax allowances are out of synchronisation. The cash expenditure is incurred on day one, whereas the tax allowances can take ten or twenty years to come into play. Even after four or five years there are significant tax allowances that are still not available. We must bring about a much fairer position——

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Is my hon. Friend asking us to subsidise the shipping industry?

Mr. Shaw: We are not asking for subsidies. What I ask for is not a subsidy; it would simply bring the risk/reward ratio into line with what it should be. I shall show my hon. Friend the graph and the statistics, and the report of the Federal Reserve Board of New York, and he will see that there would be no subsidy. Risk and reward would simply be brought back into better balance.

Mr. Wells: Let my hon. Friend admit to the Committee that he is asking for competitive subsidy for the shipping industry. That is what he is arguing for; let him be honest about it. That is not the right way in which to conduct a shipping industry in this world. Surely he must admit that?

Mr. Shaw: I reject that suggestion. If I insisted that a 100 per cent. allowance was the only solution, perhaps such a measure might reach a point at which it amounted to a subsidy, but I do not believe that that is the only solution. I ask only that it be recognised that the shipping industry has to invest more money in capital risk, recovery of which probably takes a longer time than recovery in any other industry, and that the ratio of labour costs to capital costs is vastly different.

Because there is a different risk/reward ratio, it must be accepted that there should be different tax treatment. One hundred per cent. of labour costs are written off in the year in which they are incurred; it is only capital costs in the industry that are written off over a long period.

As has already been said, when we compare the United Kingdom with the rest of Europe, we realise that there is not a level playing field in the shipping industry. I accept that we are in danger of having to go down the subsidy route because other nations are subsidising their industries out of all proportion to what is required. That is why I say that it may be necessary to have a 100 per cent. allowance for a short term so that we may have a level playing field where we can compete with the rest of Europe.

I should prefer an allowance structure that reflects the risk/reward ratio. I do not believe that, in the long term, it will be necessary to go to 100 per cent. However, we need more than the 25 per cent. writing down allowance, which does not reflect the risk/reward ratio. The report of the Federal Reserve Board makes it clear that it does not work.

I know that the Government are listening to this case as, within the past month, I took representatives of the Chamber of Shipping to see the Secretary of State for Employment. My right hon. Friend was immensely sympathetic. She listened to the problems and is making sure that her civil servants work with the shipping industry to see if a solution is possible.

I have asked for a meeting with the Chancellor. I hope that the Economic Secretary is aware of my request, that he can confirm that the meeting is to take place in the near future, and that he will attend. Such a meeting is necessary. We must put across the case for the shipping industry, and action must be taken. I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm that he is on line to take in the information that we want to bring to him. I look forward to his comments, and I commend the amendment to the Committee.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have had an excellent and very well informed debate on the British shipping industry and on the two amendments that Conservative Members have tabled. The case had been made in very similar terms by the Liberal party, the Conservative party and the parliamentary Labour party. Assistance for the British shipping industry would help our balance of payments. It would improve our invisible earnings and increase tax revenues. Hon. Members have stressed the unique trading position of British shipping as an industrial sector. It trades internationally and operates in a very competitive and highly vulnerable market.

We have heard about the steady decline of the British fleet. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) drew attention to the report of the Select Committee on Transport, which says that the decline in the British fleet is damaging trade. Hon. Members taking part in this debate have pointed out the importance to the Ministry of Defence of ships taken up from trade. Such ships were, of course, available at the time of the Falklands conflict, but if they were needed today they would not be available.

The scale of the problem facing the country today is shown by the fact that, of the approximately 19,000 people

serving in the merchant marine, about 8,500 are officers. It takes four to 10 years to train a Merchant Navy officer. The average of officers is rising. This is a feature not of stagnation in the industry but of quite dramatic decline. It has important implications for the long-term future of the industry and for the future defence of the country.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) knows something about these issues. As a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry, he dealt with them. He has said that the decline could be terminal by the year 2000. In the Select Committee, estimates have varied, but only by 10 years either way. There is not much of the industry left. The case for doing something now to help it is overwhelming.

I represent a community that has long-standing connections with the shipping and shipbuilding industries. Indeed, South Shields and North Shields have provided both ships and seamen for centuries. Sadly, their association with those industries has paralleled the industries themselves in their decline. Every hon. Member representing a shipbuilding community will remember how, at the time of the Falklands war, their constituents worked all the hours they possibly could to defend the interests of their country. That was in 1982. Some of those shipyard workers even went to sea with the fleet and served in this conflict. What happened to them? When they returned to this country, most of them were made redundant. A similar fate has befallen merchant seamen. There has been a steady decline.

10 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) pointed out, the quality of engineering work, and the computerisation and high technology aspects of the shipbuilding industry are often misunderstood. Nevertheless, they are important.

Enormous efforts have been made in the shipbuilding industrial sector, yet yesterday the Government effectively closed Swan Hunter on Tyneside. There are no orders, no work and no future for it. There was a management buy-out in 1986. Probably it is impossible for management buy-outs to compete with companies like GEC and VSEL in the industrial sector. Certainly it is impossible for them to compete with the Government in the form of Harland and Wolff.

I remind the House of the bewilderment, the bitterness and the anger felt on Tyneside because of what has happened to its shipbuilding industry. It is also right to assert that the Government should do something now to help, not our shipbuilding industry because that has gone, but the shipping and shipbuilding industry which could be helped by the amendments. The Government should accept the amendments, or there should be a vote.

In the past, we have been sceptical about 100 per cent. capital allowances, because we have been worried about the artificial manipulaton of losses and the offsetting of losses against other obligations to the Exchequer. Those issues are dealt with elsewhere in the Bill, so we need not have quite the same fear.

Conservative Members have hinted at discussions with the Treasury team. Some want discussions before returning to the matter on Report; others want discussions before returning to it perhaps in November. Discussions are likely to be protracted, in view of the attitude of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to such amendments.

If we want to concentrate the Government's mind on the amendments, the way to do so is to insert them into the Bill as an aide memoire. If the Government have better suggestions, they can put them before the House on Report. We could then consider their suggestions on their merits and compare them with the amendments, which I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): May I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) on the able way in which he moved the amendment and on the compelling and thoughtful debate that has ensued? There is no doubt about the strength of feeling on both sides of the Committee about the importance of the British merchant fleet, and of sustaining it for the future and recognising the serious difficulties and problems through which it has sailed in recent years. Tonight I am charged with the difficult responsibility—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Chair is having great difficulty in hearing the Minister. If we could have a little quiet, it would be helpful.

Mr. Nelson: I am charged with the difficult responsibility of recognising and sympathising with those real concerns, but also of setting out clearly to the Committee the primacy of dealing with the state of public finances which underlies the Budget strategy. I shall return to that in a moment. I shall also deal briefly with the contributions of all hon. Members, but I wish first to put on record a few statements about this important issue which has become something of a hardy annual in Finance Bill debates.

The amendment would introduce one leg of the industry's proposals, namely, 100 per cent. first year allowances for money spent on ships. We previously made it clear that we recognised the important contribution which shipping makes to the economy and the central role which industry can be called upon to play—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have just appealed for Members to give the Chair and the Committee an opportunity to listen to what the Minister is saying. If Members beyond the Bar want to have discussions, will they please leave the Chamber?

Mr. Nelson: The Government have, over successive years, done things to help the British Merchant Navy. They are doing things in this Budget and they have an open mind for the future, as and when the opportunity arises, to continue to sustain and help the industry. Let me set out the facts.

Since 1979 we have introduced a number of measures, including some on the tax front, to help the industry. First, in 1985 we brought forward the point at which allowances for machinery and plant could be claimed by businesses. Since then, shipping companies have consequently been able to claim relief for new ships from the date when the money was spent rather than from the time when the vessel is brought into use. This is particularly valuable to ships which take time to build.

Secondly, we have specifically helped shipping companies by giving greater flexibility in the use of writing down allowances. Before 1985, allowances for new ships could be postponed and taken in later years whenever it suited the shipowner to do so. In 1985, following

[Mr. Nelson]

representations from the shipping industry, we extended this important concession to cover purchases of second-hand ships. No other industry receives such concessions.

Thirdly, we have twice loosened the requirements which seafarers must meet to be able to claim exemption from United Kingdom tax. They need now spend only six months abroad to qualify for this concession—an arrangement which is more generous than that enjoyed by any other United Kingdom citizen working overseas.

Fourthly, on corporation tax, we have greatly reduced the rates of tax on company profits, from 52 per cent. in 1984 to 33 per cent. We have also introduced very generous arrangements enabling the carrying back of profits to be set against losses over the previous three years.

As for non-tax measures, we have put in place a succession of changes aimed at helping shipping businesses to compete internationally: grants towards the cost of merchant officer training; the funding of the Merchant Navy reserve; and financial assistance with the cost of transporting British crews to and from distant waters. As the Committee will know, next week a very important Bill —the Merchant Shipping (Registration) Bill—will come before the House of Lords which will substantially complete the implementation of the measures agreed by the 1990 joint Government-industry working party.

That list demonstrates the help that we have given to all businesses, and the additional further assistance that we have given to shipping. What we have not been prepared to do is to give concessions at an unjustified level. This amendment, clearly in our view, is just such a measure. There are a number of reasons which I must enunciate for saying that. The arguments so ably presented by my hon. friends deserve the response of the Government, and I will seek to put the Government's arguments.

First, the Government argue that the amendment would be very expensive, costing, on the Chamber of Shipping's own figures, between £80 million and more than £100 million each year in terms of tax revenue forgone—and this of course would fall in the years when finances were at their tightest and taxes generally were having to be raised.

Secondly, the extent to which it would achieve the industry's objective of stimulating increased levels of investment is highly questionable. It is worth remembering that when 100 per cent. first year capital allowances were previously available for investment in shipping, between 1970 and 1984, they did nothing to prevent a significant decline in the size of the United Kingdom merchant fleet —from 32·2 million gross registered tonnes in 1975 to 13·3 million in 1985.

Since our changes to the business tax regime in 1984, we have seen an increase in investment in ships by United Kingdom-owned companies. It is very important to appreciate that. We hear a great deal about the rundown of the British merchant fleet, but on the money side the fact is that in 1988 investment in the shipping fleet was some £45 million, but it rose to £402 million in 1991. This suggests that the remedy for the industry's difficulties must lie outside the fundamental changes to the tax treatment which the industry is seeking.

Thirdly, the amendment would do nothing to stop flagging out. That is because tax allowances are tied to ownership and not to registration, so there would be nothing to stop United Kingdom companies taking the subsidy and continuing to operate the ships from offshore registers. Moreover, such a measure would clearly run counter to the thrust of general tax policy.

Tax breaks for shipping alone would distort the market and resources would be diverted from inherently more profitable investment, which, taking the economy as a whole, might not be a sensible use of the limited financial resources available.

Other countries may choose to subsidise their shipping industries, although it has to be said that none of those countries does so to the extent of giving 100 per cent. first year allowances for capital investment. Our priorities are to ensure that the tax system is fair, that it provides a favourable climate for all businesses to operate in, and that profitable investment is properly rewarded.

Even under the current system, the United Kingdom has a particularly generous system of capital allowances. When the first year allowance for machinery and plant reverts to 25 per cent. in November, expenditure can be written off for tax purposes over seven to eight years, and will still be significantly higher than the rate of economic depreciation for most business assets, particularly for ships, which generally last for much longer than the tax system allows.

The industry, therefore, is already getting a particularly good deal from the present system, and the tax it pays on its profits is the lowest in Europe; it is also lower than that in Japan and the United States.

I turn briefly but specifically to the contributions of my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey said that time is of the essence. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) stressed the defence implications and the importance of the shipbuilding industry, a point emotionally and justifiably made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on behalf of his constituency and the official Opposition.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) called for a strategic overview. I acknowledge the importance of the industry in his constituency, which I know well, and point out the help that is available through the home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme and the shipbuilding intervention fund to assist the industry.

The hon. Gentleman and the House should acknowledge that there are three related but quite separate issues: the shipbuilding industry, the shipowning industry, and the British register of shipping.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. It is utterly impossible to hear a word that is being said.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have appealed to the Committee twice to give the Minister the opportunity to be heard. My appeal appears to have fallen on deaf ears. Once again I appeal to all hon. Members, especially beyond the Bar. If they want to talk, they should leave the Chamber. Those on both Front Benches are not setting a great example.

Mr. Nelson: I am anxious to address with expedition but with courtesy the points raised by those who contributed to this important debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) rightly referred to the high initial capital cost of ships. We have a generous system of writing down tax allowances, especially with the 40 per cent. enhanced tax allowance introduced in the clause. It will enable people to claim back more than 60 per cent. over two years and, in any case, the writing down allowance of some 25 per cent. is much faster than the rate of depreciation of the real value of the ships.

With regard to the difficulties that my right hon. Friend and others flagged up about differences between the computations of the Chamber of Shipping and the Government, our assessments of the yields forgone and the cost of the measures are based on the figures presented by the Chamber of Shipping which suggested to us that the net cost per annum would be about £30 million to £45 million a year over five years. That is on a net basis, taking account of the guesstimate assessment of income that would accrue from the investments that were made discounted back to a present value basis. If that is not done, the yield cost rises to between £80 and £115 million a year. I believe that the Chamber of Shipping would agree those figures.

The measure adds up to a significant cost, about £380 million over and above the £700 million relief which the Government are providing.

I am the Treasury Minister whose prime responsibility is to sell gilt-edged securities and raise funding through the Department of National Savings. Given the size of this year's PSBR, I have a big enough job on my hands without adding to it significantly. We are providing some £700 million of relief; an additional cost of some £380 million over the next five years would be difficult to sustain.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) said that we must act. Like others, he spoke of foreign competition and the balance of payments. I acknowledge that the balance of payments, and the gross inflows of money that have been so important to us in the past, provide the basis of one of the most persuasive arguments in favour of the amendment.

10.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) spoke of the shipping industry's importance to the economy, reminding us that some 30,000 people were indirectly employed in it. He and others pointed to its association with professional industries in the United Kingdom; but they, too, rely not only on indirect capital allowances to the British merchant fleet, but on the health and vibrancy of the British economy—on low tax rates and sensible management. They rely on Government to provide a climate in which they can prosper and attract professional business from all over the world.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) also spoke of international competition. He asked why the British fleet had declined. I can provide no better reference than the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, who cited some of the reasons for that decline.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) said that the country's defence strategy would be gravely at risk unless we acted now by providing enhanced capital allowances to help the industry. As was pointed out during a debate in July in which my hon. Friend took part, Operation Granby in the Gulf was extremely successful: we were able voluntarily to charter some 109 foreign vessels, and only five United Kingdom vessels. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has made it clear on behalf of the Government that we can mount such operations, that we have been successful, and that we believe that, if necessary, we could do so again.

My hon. Friend said that, nevertheless, the industry had declined over 10 years, and that that must not be allowed to continue; and he asked me for a commitment that I would listen. I hope I have shown that I have done that. He also asked me for a commitment that I would be prepared to speak to the Chamber of Shipping about the matter in the immediate future. I am more than happy to extend such an invitation, and to meet the Chamber of Shipping.

It is not for me to determine what issues come up on Report, but I am more than willing to concede that it is my responsibility to listen, learn and pay attention to consultations, as I have done during the debate.

For all those reasons and more, I urge all my hon. Friends to understand that we must concentrate on tackling the state of our public finances to ensure that the deficit is tackled without hindrance to recovery. We cannot do that if, in clause after clause, we add to the amount that we must borrow: that is to put off until tomorrow problems with which we must deal today. Although we may not be able to go as far as some would like in helping the industry today, we have a creditable record.

Sir Giles Shaw: I have listened carefully to the speech of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. He has agreed to meet the industry. Will he agree to examine the question of the maritime enterprise zone and other measures to see whether they are acceptable? Provided that he discusses a wide range of issues with the industry, the meeting will be helpful. That is what the industry wants.

Mr. Nelson: I shall be more than happy to entertain any suggestions and ideas that are presented. The Treasury's doors are open. I must point out, however, that, according to our estimates, the three elements of the maritime enterprise zone package would cost between £300 million and £500 million, of which the 100 per cent. allowance would be by far the largest part. It would be quite improper to raise hopes. I must be straight with the Committee, but I will listen to sensible proposals. There may be other times and possibilities. Certainly I give the undertaking that my hon. Friend seeks.

Sir Giles Shaw: I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises that this issue is of extreme importance and one that requires extreme care, good listening and good discussion. In view of the urgency of the matter, I hope that he will agree to do that quickly. If it is possible to make a further statement on Report, or to bring further proposals before the Committee, I hope that he will so do.

In view of these assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose*——

The First Deputy Chairman: No.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 244, Noes 279.

Division No. 267] **[10.20 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Allen, Graham
Adams, Mrs Irene	Alton, David
Ainger, Nick	Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Armstrong, Hilary

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*

Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 53, in page 84, line 20, leave out "1993" and insert "1994".

It was our original intention to construct this debate in such a way as to allow us to have a general debate on general allowances and perhaps accommodate the debate on shipping as well. However, there was so much interest in the shipping allowances—the Chancellor has taken a deep, long and sustained interest in this matter—that we thought it right to have the debate in the manner which we have done. Many Labour Members wish to debate the matter covered by this amendment—that is, a general debate about capital allowances. Equally, Conservative Members are eager to take part in this debate, and I am sure that there will be an equivalent number of Labour Members. It is good that the Chancellor is here to listen to a debate on what is left of our nation's manufacturing base.

The parameters for the debate are well known to every Member of Parliament who represents a constituency with large manufacturing interests. Indeed, I represented such a constituency until yesterday, although I am not sure that that will be the case next week. The decline in economic growth for 10 consecutive quarters has taken its toll. Throughout that period, we have managed to have a balance of payments deficit. We have had a balance of payments deficit even in recession. The deficit now acts as a constraint on recovery. In 10 of the past 13 years since 1979, net investment in new machinery has taken place at less than the rate at which old machinery has been scrapped. Until 1982, the United Kingdom enjoyed trade surpluses in manufactured goods. Since 1983, we have suffered deficits in the same area. Since 1979, two out of every five jobs in manufacturing industry have disappeared, and the Government's response has been feeble in the extreme.

It is the Labour party's contention that some certainty of intervention is required from the Government. Our amendment, as well as being a vehicle for debate, is modest. It simply seeks to extend the time period for the concessions contained in the Bill. That is not a concept that the Chancellor will find difficult—indeed, he has applied the same concept to many other areas of taxation in the Budget.

The amendment is modest, but it will provide some certainty for those who would like to rely on the concessions. I commend it to the Committee.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): The short-term encouragement of investment in plant and equipment which was provided by the Chancellor's announcement on capital allowances last year was welcome. There are good grounds for believing that it has contributed to the recovery which has clearly begun in manufacturing industry. However, we need a longer-term programme to encourage investment in the United Kingdom, especially investment by small and medium-sized enterprises which are rightly described as crucial to our economic success.

I shall make a brief declaration of interest. My constituency has not only a great deal of manufacturing industry but a number of machine tool companies and I am an adviser to the Machine Tool Technologies Association. It goes without saying that the machine tool industry would like to see a major improvement in capital investment in the United Kingdom. However, it does not seek specific support directed at its own sector. Rather, it looks to the Government to develop fiscal policies which encourage more smaller companies to invest in the type of equipment which will provide tomorrow's growth.

It is often pointed out that a significant proportion of the largest companies in Europe are located in the United Kingdom. A major proportion of the work force here is employed by those companies. But at the same time relatively few small and medium-sized enterprises develop to become manufacturing giants in their own right. It seems likely that one factor which holds them back is a marked reluctance to invest in high technology modern equipment compared with many of their overseas competitors.

I suggest that that is regrettable, not only because of the opportunity forgone to generate additional employment opportunities, but because smaller companies are particularly important in driving forward innovation. The most modern advanced equipment is often expensive. I believe that we need a strategic policy to help small and medium-sized companies to re-equip and put themselves at the leading edge of technology. That is what the Japanese and others who have enjoyed considerable success have done in the past. It is not called intervention, but it is a policy which encourages investment. It is directed specifically towards smaller firms, which happen to be those which are often placed at a disadvantage because they are more vulnerable than many of their customers and suppliers in matters such as cash flow and because they are reluctant to take risks which might leave them at the mercy of their bankers.

Although Japan, like other countries, has suffered in the recession, it is notable that in recent years Japanese companies have invested twice as much as many others in capital equipment. If we are to get on the same track, we need to follow suit. The Confederation of British Industry national manufacturing council has said that Britain needs to double its level of investment in capital equipment by the end of the decade in order to match our industrial competitors.

In terms of investment, the United Kingdom has remained bottom of the G7 countries and low down among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. In Europe, German economic performance has been particularly notable in recent years. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has identified low levels of investment in capital as a major deficiency among British firms compared with their German counterparts.

A choice between more generous capital allowances and higher corporation tax is often put. My experience is that, offered that choice, a substantial proportion of companies would be willing to pay a higher rate of corporation tax, provided that it was combined with more positive allowances to encourage investment.

The debate has provided an opportunity to air the issue. I suggest that we need a more focused incentive to investment than the amendment implies. Capital allowances should be more generous than those which currently exist, but they should bring special benefits to smaller and medium-sized enterprises. Above all, they should be targeted to bring about the investment in the type of high technology which is more widely available to some of Britain's most successful competitors and which is becoming increasingly essential. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will therefore consider the need for an appropriate strategy.

Mr. Beith: There are broadly two views about corporation tax allowances and the rate of corporation tax and the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has just advanced one of them. The Chancellor has embraced both of them during the past two years. One view is that we should try to keep the corporation tax rate down and, therefore, not grant a wide range of capital allowances. The other is that capital allowances for investment are more likely to bring about investment and that many business men—I know that this is true—would be willing to accept such a trade-off. They would risk a higher rate of corporation tax, or at least no further reduction, if they could get higher investment allowances.

Those who favour allowances include those who believe that those allowances should be selective or targeted. The hon. Member for Keighley advanced that view. The Labour party has advanced that view from time to time by seeking a restriction to manufacturing industry. It is one thing to target certain things which seem to be for the general good and should be the subject of allowances, such as environmental improvements; it is another to draw a broad distinction between manufacturing industry and services. That cannot reasonably be done. It does not make sense. I say that despite wishing to see British manufacturing industry revived. To impose an artificial division between manufacturing and services would not help British industry.

10.45 pm

In the aftermath of the recession the Government were forced to look for a way to stimulate the economy, and so departed from their previous strong line against more generous capital allowances. In doing so, they probably reflected the views of many business men. Certainly in the consultations that I have had recently with business men, the majority have argued for the allowance route rather than the lower corporation tax route.

If one tells business men to bear in mind the fact that Britain has lower corporation tax than Germany, they say, "Yes, but look at the use that German manufacturers are able to make of their investment allowances, the level of investment and the quality of German manufacturing plant compared with ours". That is a persuasive argument. It leads one to consider the merits of the amendment, which argues for extending the time scale.

Perhaps we can have a sort of Newbury extension to the capital allowances in the light of the fact that there is clearly greater public dissatisfaction over the recession than the Government first allowed. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said that the Chancellor had readily taken up the concept of extending the time scale into other aspects of tax policy. He carries it also into his view of his job. He is extending the time scale of that as much as he possibly can against all those who are trying to get rid of him.

There probably would be merit in extending the time scale. The Government may have in mind the fact that a cut-off date is sometimes in itself a useful way of stimulating investment, as Lord Howe found out when he was Chancellor. But industry is looking for longer-term encouragement.

Despite my belief that we do not want to get to the point where the Government are choosing what is industry's best investment, trying to run industry and having such a complex system of investment allowances that they are pretending to know better than industry what is a sensible investment, we must listen, particularly in the face of all the signs of the decline of our manufacturing industry, to the pleas of manufacturers for investment allowances.

There was a case for the Government's decision in the Budget to go back on their previous rather hard line on the issue and there may be a case for keeping it going a bit longer.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): When I spoke recently with local business men and with Coventry and Warwickshire CBI at its annual meeting with local Members of Parliament, two issues emerged that were central to their decision to invest in manufacturing. The first was the need for better incentives, particularly capital allowances, over the longer term to encourage manufacturing investment. The second was the need to have confidence in the Chancellor's management of the economy so that they could have confidence that the Government knew what they were doing and had some sort of long-term strategy which would allow them to invest in their industry. The Budget and the Bill provide neither of those.

My constituency and my region have been hard hit by the recession. In north Warwickshire, unemployment has risen by 135 per cent. since the Prime Minister took office. Federal Express, Burlingtons and Coventry pit have all closed. Daw Mill pit has sought to make redundant 587 men, half its work force. In the west midlands as a whole, manufacturing industry has been devastated. In the past couple of months 640 jobs were lost at Rolls-Royce in Coventry, 100 jobs at British Rail in Walsall, 75 at Courtaulds in Coventry, 227 at Leyland DAF and 160 at Sandwell Contract Services. The list goes on.

Once, local people in the west midlands were proud to see "Made in the west midlands" on products. Unfortunately, that is now all too rare. Britain's manufacturing heartland now has 42 people chasing every job. Indeed, "Made in Britain" is not only on fewer products these days, but more products are imported into Britain having been made in Hong Kong, the United States, France or Taiwan, than we export with "Made in Britain" on them.

Manufacturing investment fell by 13 per cent. between 1989 and 1991. In 1992 it fell by 2 per cent. and it is expected to grow only marginally this year. The decline in manufacturing industry, resulting from the lack of a clear industrial strategy, is the major cause of our balance of trade problems.

Manufacturing activity is now barely above the levels of 1979, while our performance relative to most of our competitors has seen Britain slipping further behind. Many business men see the Conservative attitude to manufacturing investment as that expressed by a recent Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said:

> "I am at a loss to understand the selective importance attached . . . to the manufacturing sector."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1984; Vol. 53, c. 1009.]

The present Chancellor's recent conversion to the need to give some support to manufacturing industry is an example of too little, too late. The damage has been done. Determined action is needed for recovery and the Bill does not provide that action.

Manufacturing is a key sector of the economy, because it is the engine of growth and the purveyor of technical progress. As a nation, two thirds of our earnings from foreign currency come from manufactured goods. With

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

the decline in North sea oil, the manufacturing sector is the essential ingredient for solving the balance of payments problem. Failure to support manufacturing investment in the 1980s has resulted in a trade deficit in the middle of a recession for the first time in post-war history. Import penetration is growing. As recovery comes, imports are likely to increase, making the deficit even worse.

If we are to avoid a balance of payments crisis and a collapse of the pound, we must begin to act. Labour's call to extend capital allowances is an important element in an overall package. It recognises the need to boost manufacturing as recovery takes place. Business men know that the Government's deferred tax increases, planned for next year, will hit demand at the very time that they expected to invest more in order to create recovery. They will be concerned about too great a commitment of their companies' finances and resources at the very time when the recovery, such as it is, may be damaged by the Government's deferred tax increases.

It seems that this is the first recovery in history where action has been taken to damp it down before it has really got started. Business men need greater encouragement over the longer term to invest, both now and over the next few years, to ensure that British manufacturing industry can recover and create the goods to meet any new demand that may be created in Britain, rather than allowing that demand to suck in imports. That is why capital allowances are so important.

Capital allowances, however, must be seen as only part of an overall strategy for manufacturing industry. That strategy must include improving the skills of our current work force and improving the education of our young people, our future work force. We must create a highly educated, highly skilled new work force that is able to adapt to the changing demands of business and the international economy.

One set of figures is interesting in this connection—that 27 per cent. of British workers have technical qualifications, whereas 53 per cent. in Germany, 57 per cent. in the Netherlands and 40 per cent. in France have technical qualifications. If we do not increase our skills, we shall be unable to compete on quality. If we cannot compete on the quality of our products, we shall be forced to drive down wages and overheads so as to be able to compete on price. We do not want to see British salaries and working conditions decline to third-world levels. Until Ministers remove the low-skill shackles from workers, Britain will not have a long-term competitive future.

Other key needs include improved infrastructure, particularly the transport infrastructure. We also need to target high technology and high-growth new businesses, with tax allowances for new investment. We need, too, financial institutions that look to the long term, that invest in the long term and that small business men can rely upon to see them through the troughs of recession. It is the lack of a clear industrial strategy to complement capital allowances that is missing in Government policy.

At the moment, business men cannot see any strategy in place. That brings us back to the central issue that business men in my area have relayed to me—a lack of confidence. Business men need a Government who have direction and leadership. The current Chancellor does not inspire confidence in his judgment. He was the Chancellor who hallucinated about the green shoots that were not there and who promised no devaluation, no leaving the exchange rate mechanism, no VAT rises and no tax rises. How can the country have confidence in the economic judgment of a Chancellor who changes his policies so readily, so quickly and so easily? The Chancellor explained away his U-turns—his S-bends—by saying during the last election campaign that he had no plans to raise taxes: he did not foresee the problems or the length of the recession.

Even if that were entirely true, does not the Chancellor see that that undermines the confidence of business men in his judgment about how the country and the economy should develop? We have a Chancellor whose judgment is unsound and a Prime Minister who took us into the ERM at too high an exchange rate. That suggests that both men at the helm of Britain's economy are quite capable of taking us on to the rocks. Business men know that the judgment of the Chancellor is unsound and that the Budget will do nothing to restore confidence.

Business men know that, if there is any recovery, it will be, in a sense, by accident rather than as a result of the success of Government policy. Britain is now in a more competitive position because of its withdrawal from the ERM, and that withdrawal was a failure of Government policy. Therefore, any possible recovery will be the result not of success of a policy that was pursued over a long period but of the Government's failure to follow their stated policy. In pursuing that policy, which was initiated by the current Prime Minister, more than 10 per cent. of the work force lost their jobs.

Britain needs a long-term policy aimed at full employment, supply side policies directed at skills, infrastructure and investment in plant and machinery. That is needed particularly to boost our manufacturing exports to tackle the balance of payments deficit. Without such policies, the United Kingdom economy cannot increase its productive capacity, competitiveness or growth and unemployed people in my constituency will not find the jobs that they so very much need.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I do not intend to detain the House very long, but I want to deal with the appalling results of the Government's lack of an industrial strategy in the past 14 years.

The Government's strategy has been based on one simple numerical indicator—getting down inflation. As a result of their rather bungled attempts to reduce inflation we have lost a huge part of our manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing's share has fallen by 6 or 7 per cent. of GDP since 1979. I am sure that, in time-honoured fashion, the Minister will say that it has fallen in other countries and that it is due to the world recession, increased productivity and so on, but it has fallen by only 3 per cent. in Germany and by only 2 per cent. in France. Those figures are not comparable with Britain's huge deficit.

The Government should have looked carefully at the industrial strategy that the Labour party proposed before the last election. By the end of this Parliament, they will have come round to our view, and probably will adopt many of our ideas.

We said that more investment should be made in capital equipment, in training and education and especially in industrial research and development. Such investment is sadly lacking in this country. A comparison of capital spending per employee in other countries shows clearly what that lack of investment is doing. If we take the United

Kingdom's base line as one, the United States and Germany spend about one and a half times as much. France spends 1·6 times as much per employee on capital equipment, and Japan 2·7 times as much. That is why they have better equipped factories, better motivated workers and better management.

11 pm

It is important to explain that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) said, everything is linked, and the lack of training sometimes deters managers from introducing new machinery. It is true that the poor level of training of the average British worker means that in British factories it takes longer to train workers when new equipment is installed than it does in Germany or France. That is due not to an inherent lack of skill in British workers but to a lack of training, and it often makes it difficult for managers to install new machinery.

Incentives are therefore needed. It is right that the time limits should be extended, and I hope that Ministers will consider that idea carefully. We now have an enormous trade deficit in some extremely important goods, such as electrical goods, motor vehicles, textiles, footwear and clothing—all of which are categories in which Britain used to reign supreme, certainly in Europe and probably in the world.

It may seem curious that I, as the hon. Member of Parliament for Cambridge, should speak about manufacturing industry, although most of the companies in my constituency are small high-tech firms. However, several firms in my constituency supply machinery to larger manufacturing industries, and that is the cause of my concern. If the Government provided some incentive for firms to equip themselves better with plant and machinery, the businesses in my constituency would benefit, as they would supply the equipment.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): Does the hon. Lady accept that the logic of her argument would prejudice software houses in her constituency at the expense of the manufacturing industries to which she referred? What conceivable economic rationale could there be for doing that?

Mrs. Campbell: That is a curious piece of logic, which I am at a loss to understand. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to explain it to me in detail at some stage. Of course I do not accept that investment in manufacturing industry necessarily means that the Government have to do something crazy such as refraining from investing in the computer industry.

Firms in my constituency could supply equipment such as scanning electron microscopes—which few firms in the world make—television transmitters and industrial motor vehicles. We need a thriving manufacturing industry, and the amendment would help that industry, so I hope that Conservative Members will accept it.

Mr. Nelson: The brevity of this debate has been no reflection on its profundity. I have been fascinated by the varied in-depth contributions which have been made on the back of the thoughtful amendment moved by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). I shall dispose of—or rather, deal with—the amendment by saying that it seeks to extend from one to two years the period over which allowances are available, which would have two important effects. First, it would increase the cost of the new relief by about £700 million over the next couple of years, at precisely the time when we can least afford it. The Committee will be aware that the increase in writing-down allowances provided for in the clause will already give rise to a yield cost of some £700 million over a couple of years, and the amendment would add a further £720 million in the period up to the year 1995-96.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It would help the debate if the Economic Secretary could tell us how the figures are calculated.

Mr. Nelson: Of course, they have to be guestimates. We hope that they are accurate. It is inevitable that any assessment of the value of a written-down allowance relief has to be based on speculation as to the level of investment that will take place. We can gain some indication from trends—and we have, goodness knows, enough well-qualified people working in the Central Statistical Office and in the Treasury to come forward with a good idea. If it is different, I invite the hon. Gentleman to explain why it would be a lesser cost. Even if it were £200 million less, it would be a considerable addition on top of the substantial relief that the Government have already given.

Secondly, relaxing the time limit would severely weaken the incentive to bring investment forward. It is the case with all time-limited concessions that the peak of activity is concentrated in the period immediately before the measure is due to be withdrawn. Putting back the expiry date clearly defers the incentive to invest quickly before the relief runs out. For the medium term, our view remains that our policy of low rates of tax levied across a broad base is the right one for business. Once confidence is restored, special tax incentives should no longer be required. We therefore see no case for extending the period over which the allowances are to be made available on the basis of the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) spoke about the importance of the machine tool industry. I was most interested in what he had to say. He called for a strategy of more generous capital allowances for small and medium-sized enterprises. That is precisely what we have sought to do in extending the allowance to 40 per cent. I should also mention that in another clause we are increasing the up-front allowance for industrial and agricultural buildings.

he right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) welcomed the additional relief but called for more. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, he suggested that some people liked to pay lower corporation tax while others liked enhanced capital allowances. Depending on the circumstances of a firm, one or other will be to its advantage. It is not surprising that there are different views. Our judgment remains that which we made in the mid-80s—that it is better to have much lower levels of corporation tax on the stream of profit and income than to have the special selection and second guessing which belie capital allowance policy.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Unlike some hon. Members who have spoken, I represent a manufacturing constituency. In all the factory visits that I make in the course of my rounds in Teesside, I have never heard any business suggest that it would be happier if corporation tax went up, even if there were an allowance. Firms which

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

address me on the point want the allowance and the lower rate of tax. They do not want a higher rate of tax and an allowance. They are in favour of the Government's broad strategy of bringing corporation tax down and a little help as well. What has done far more than capital allowances to enhance investment in north-east industry has been Japanese inward investment into the region and the greater emphasis on quality and total quality management.

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is a champion in the House for manufacturing industry in his constituency. He has proved yet again the importance that he attaches to those matters. His words speak for themselves.

The hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) spoke about recession in manufacturing industry in the midlands. He referred to the importance that he attaches to quality and competitiveness—something on which we agree entirely.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) spoke eloquently about the small, high technology firms in her constituency and also called for improved capital equipment incentives. We believe that an industrial strategy should rest not just on the delivery of low inflation and low interest rates, but crucially on their longevity. It is vital that we have a period of stability in which low interest rates and low inflation are sustained. If we can add low taxation and deregulation, and if we can build on the special help provided in the autumn statement and the Budget for the automotive industry, that should help many of the areas represented in this short debate.

For all these reasons, I hope that the Committee will agree that what we have brought forward is what the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has moved for two successive years and called for on behalf of the Opposition. The Government have delivered that—to acclaim, I hope, from both sides of the Committee. It is an expensive relief, and we do not feel able to go further tonight.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There is a very large audience—supporters of the Government party—here tonight for this important discussion and I know that they will welcome the fact that I have copious notes with which to reinforce the arguments already put in this debate. I know that they will also welcome the fact that I have with me a copy of the Labour party's new document, "Making Britain's Future"—a document which clearly would inform a debate on capital allowances. Given the distinguished nature of the audience, I think it would be right to read the whole document into the record. However, I will not.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 115 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill (Clauses 42, 48, 52, 67, 115 and 183) reported, without amendment; to lie upon the Table.

Teesside International Airport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

11.11 pm

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise the future of Teesside international airport and its development and opportunities for development. In this debate I will seek to outline why the development of the airport goes hand in hand with the privatisation of the airport.

There are three reasons why this issue has taken on a new sense of urgency and vigour in recent days. First, at 11 am on Monday 10 May 1993—a date and time that will go down in history—an announcement was made by the Local Government Commission proposing the abolition of Cleveland county and the removal of Darlington from the county of Durham for administrative purposes.

The significance of this announcement is that Teesside international airport is owned jointly by Cleveland county council, with a majority stake of 60 per cent., and Durham county council, with a 40 per cent. stake. Hence, assuming that the Local Government Commission's proposals are accepted, the airport is heading for an uncertain period of transition as discussions take place with the new Durham authority and Darlington, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Stockton and Langbaurgh authorities to see whether they wish to take over the shareholding in the airport or to sell, and, if the latter, to whom.

The second reason stems from the decision of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his autumn statement to allow proceeds from capital assets disposed of in the current year by local authorities to be used for other capital projects in the county.

Call me an old-fashioned capitalist, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I think that county councils such as Cleveland and Durham seem to find it difficult enough to maintain our schools and roads, and look after the police and the fire brigade, without dabbling in what is a highly sophisticated and competitive business of running an international airport. Indeed, how often do I receive a clarion call from those local authorities that they are starved of resources. Many of my constituents and council tax payers in Cleveland and Durham may therefore be bewildered as to why these councils wish to retain £20 million of their assets and money tied up in an airport when they have failed to see a dividend on those assets in the past 20 years, and when schools and roads remain in a state of disrepair. The Chancellor's window of opportunity will not be open for long. That is why I am calling on Cleveland and Durham to put the interest of the airport and their council tax payers first by commencing discussions that will lead to the immediate sale of the airport.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): The control tower and the runway are in my constituency, whereas the reception buildings are in the neighbouring constituency of Sedgefield. The division between the two local authorities has been deleterious to the development of the airport which has amazing opportunities for developing the regional airport network around Europe, particularly with the growth of inter-regional links and the developing

northern arc within the European Community as markets develop directly between different parts of the nation states without going through the south-east of England.

The other opportunity open to us in the north-east is provided by the over-capacity of the London airports which are unable to service the aircraft and provide the incoming transatlantic routes with the capacity they need and could be serviced equally well by regional airports such as our excellent one in Teesside. We are missing that opportunity because of the short-sightedness of the blinkered socialist directors of the airport authority that we are saddled with.

Mr. Bates: My hon. Friend has taken an interest in the development of Teesside airport and has long supported its privatisation, and I am grateful for his comments tonight.

Having mentioned privatisation, let me explain what I have in mind. The indecision and uncertainty which are bound to result from changes in the ownership of the airport could not come at a worse time for the 140 management and staff at Teesside airport who, under the leadership of Bob Goldfield, their new managing director, have brought the airport back from pre-tax losses of £240,000 in the financial year to March 1992 to a modest pre-tax profit of £134,000 in the year to March 1993.

Although the profit has to be placed in context as it does not take account of debt charges and includes a substantial amount as a result of NATO exercises based at the airport last year, I believe that the management of the airport should be given the chance to take full financial control of the enterprise—in other words, a management buy-out. Such a move would end a period of uncertainty, allow access to the financial markets for development capital and would present the management and staff with a golden opportunity which I have every confidence in their ability to exploit outside the fetters of municipal control.

The third reason why the airport should be privatised is so that capital can be available for the development of the airport to ensure that it can take full advantage of the opportunities thrown up by the liberalisation of EC aviation through the European Community's historic aviation package which came into effect on 1 January 1993 and which will establish a single market in aviation.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising a matter which is of great interest to my constituents as well as to his. On EC liberalisation, does he agree that the end of the transitional arrangements of the liberalisation package will open up new opportunities for the airports to have routes from Belfast to Teesside and on to Brussels and that great opportunities are provided by the great demand for flights to the continent and that these opportunities can best be taken up if his proposals are put into effect in future?

Mr. Bates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point. It has long been the view of many of us who have taken an interest in the development of the airport. Of a passenger throughput of some 345,000, some 200,000 was due to the British Midland service to Heathrow. Clearly, if the airport is to have a prosperous future, it will have to diversify and expand its European routes. It is beginning to happen already with British Northern developing services to Brussels and the package tours which will be introduced from next year.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend recognise that he is arguing not only for Teesside airport but for a principle? My area in the north-west contains Manchester airport—a leading regional airport which, even recently, has been given a second terminal following a £250 million investment. If released from local authority control, it too could take advantage of the liberalisation of the airways: it could expand far more, and serve people in the north-west—and even those further afield—better than it does now.

Mr. Bates: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Nothing that I have said this evening applies exclusively to Teesside; it could apply equally to many regional airports. Indeed, it applies to every local authority, not just to Cleveland and Durham. Airports such as East Midlands and Leeds are currently going through the process that I am advocating. Air traffic competition could be liberated.

I believe that Teesside has the potential to rival Newcastle as the north-east's major airport. Indeed, that was the recommendation of the Stratford report, commissioned by the then Minister for Aviation and Shipping, Mr. Clinton Davis, in 1978. The report went into great detail about which of the three regional airports —Teesside, Newcastle and Carlisle—should be designated the growth airport. That was in the days when the Labour party still believed in a centrally planned economy. We have been denied the opportunity to find out whether they still do; the Opposition Benches are empty.

The Stratford report recommended Teesside airport because of the scope for extending the 7,500 ft runway to carry the new Boeing 747s; because it was less likely to be fog bound, which is why it was used by the RAF as a base for Vulcan bombers until 1962; because the majority of potential passengers lived nearer to Teesside than to Newcastle or Carlisle; and because it benefited from more available air space than either of its rivals. However, when the report was published, its recommendation was overturned, and the prestigious category B status was given to Newcastle. Teesside was banded in category C.

It is interesting to consider the fortunes of the two airports since 1978, when that decision was made. In 1978, Newcastle airport had 880,000 passengers; the figure for Teesside was 321,000. Last year, Teesside airport had a passenger throughput of 345,000—an increase of just 7·5 per cent. In contrast, Newcastle airport's throughput had increased to 2 million—an increase of 127 per cent., almost 17 times the growth in passenger numbers at Teesside. That is why Newcastle was able to deliver a £1·5 million dividend to its owners last year, which I do not resent.

I am pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is present, as I am sure that he takes a considerable interest in the matter. I do not begrudge that money to his authority; none the less, it will be a long time before Cleveland and Durham receive anything in return for their investment in Teesside airport. They have said that the prospect of a dividend remains "a long-term goal".

Another aspect of the airport that must be mentioned is the 250 acres of prime development land on the site. That land could be developed as a business or technology park were it not for planning restrictions which insist that any development should be airport related. Airport related! My only prerequisite is that any investment should be related to prosperity and jobs. If the councils will not make the decision to remove that restriction, Teesside

[Mr. Bates]

development corporation should be allowed to expand its area of operation to cover the airport and ensure that planning decisions are not political decisions, just business decisions.

Here we have an airport that has been a victim of 1970s-style central planning whose resources for development have been limited by local authorities but which serves a dynamic and developing area. Its management have the skills to turn the airport into a profitable venture within a year. The Chancellor has provided a golden opportunity for local authorities to sell their stake in the airport and to use the proceeds to benefit the communities that they serve. We have the third European Community aviation package which gives huge potential for the development of air traffic.

Our plea this evening is clear. For stability, for success, for Teesside, we appeal to Cleveland and Durham county councils to release this venture from the dead hand of municipal government and allow the professionals and private capital to develop the airport into a fitting gateway to the most dynamic industrial area in the country, Teesside.

11.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris): May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) on bringing forward this important subject this evening. I recall that he and I were denied a breakfast-time rendezvous on the Consolidated Fund Bill just before Christmas to discuss this issue and I fully recognise his concern about the airport and its future. I am delighted to see my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) and for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and I are somewhat of an endangered species these days as probably the only two living Tory by-election victors in existence or, should I say, not in captivity. Perhaps that is inappropriate. Perhaps I should have said "in captivity". Nevertheless, I am delighted to see him here and to welcome his contribution and also to see my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), not forgetting the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) who, I know, takes a tremendous interest in all these matters.

Teesside airport operates as a public airport company, Teesside International Airport Ltd. The company acquired the airport undertaking, property and certain other assets and liabilities from Cleveland and Durham county councils on 1 April 1987 under part II of the Airports Act 1986. The company is therefore, as my hon. Friend says, wholly owned by the two county councils and it is very much a public sector entity.

Our general attitude towards regional airports is that we want them to develop and prosper, handling all the traffic that they can attract, not only for the benefits that they can bring for those who live in the regions but for the contribution that they can make to relieving pressure on the London airports.

The area in which Government are uniquely well placed to help is in international negotiation. For nearly a decade the United Kingdom has put the opening up of new routes high on the agenda and major changes have been delivered, especially within the European Community. Since 1 January this year traffic rights have been available for all Community air carriers to operate air services on virtually any route within the Community, whether scheduled or charter, passenger or cargo. Complex procedures for approving fares have been swept away. We have created a climate in which air services and fares can become more competitive and more responsive to what the customer wants.

I am very proud of the role that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State played during the time of the British presidency in pressing these important issues to the stage where the third liberalisation package represents a major advance in the progress of the single market and is an issue in which Britain has consistently been in the lead.

Coming closer to home, I wonder if I may detain my hon. Friends with just a word about the concern that I know the managers at Teesside airport feel over what they see as a risk to the continuation of services to London, particularly to Heathrow. I understand the desire of airports like Teesside to maintain strong air services with the capital—at the moment, Teesside has five flights to Heathrow each weekday—and I have no doubt that the local community, especially businesses, will do all that it can to support this provision of services. The management of the airport also has a role to play through the provision of good quality airport services for people to enjoy as they connect with their flights. But I am bound to say that I agree with the recent Civil Aviation Authority report which said that those sorts of service, although clearly important for the regions that they serve, must stand up commercially and that there are no grounds for distorting the air services market to "protect" those regional services to congested airports.

I want to make a number of points in the debate and I will, of necessity, cover them only briefly. First, the decision on which routes to serve is now very much one for the commercial decision of airlines. The present system of take-off and landing slot allocation and regulation at our busiest airports means that airlines can continue to operate their existing services for as long as they wish to, because the slots they hold and operate carry historic rights, sometimes referred to as "grandfather rights". I can assure my hon. Friend that British Midland can therefore continue to operate the service between Teesside and Heathrow for as long as it wishes. I have no reason to believe that British Midland has any intention of withdrawing that service.

Although some of our regional airports have seen their services to London cut, there is none the less a healthy market in the provision of air services between London and the regions. It must be for the providers of those services, the airlines themselves, to decide whether it is in their commercial interest to continue to do so. Certainly, it would not be right for me to dictate from Marsham street what level of services should be provided to each point or, as the Teesside airport managers suggested to the CAA, what level of subsidy should be paid to airlines to maintain those services. We have been down that path before and, frankly, it does not work. Unnecessary, artificial market constraints or supports inevitably lead to artificial and unsustainable markets. In a market-led air transport industry geared to meeting passenger needs carriers must retain the ability to adjust their services and schedules in response to changes in consumer demand.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important not only to maintain the links between the regional airports and London, but to establish and reinforce the links between regional airports and the international airports? I am thinking of Manchester here. There are many people who do not wish to travel from the regions down to London to take international flights. They would far prefer to take their flights from the areas in which they live to the destination to which they wish to go.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right. As I said at the beginning, the Government's attitude is very clear. First, passengers should dictate where air services are provided. I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a great deal of good sense in avoiding the congestion around the major London airports. Heathrow is not the only airport that serves London. None the less, my hon. Friend is entirely right that where there is an opportunity for passengers to travel via Manchester, and it is in the operators' interest therefore to provide those services, the present Government would certainly see no difficulty whatsoever in encouraging that and in a sense providing a regime in which British Midland or any other operator can build on those services and offer to service local businesses.

On that question—this is related somewhat to that issue—I know of suggestions that we should use article 9 of the EC regulations effectively to ring-fence slots for airports such as Teesside at Heathrow. I do not believe that that would be valuable. First, I do not believe that it could ensure the survival of a particular service. One can ring-fence the slot, but ring-fencing the slot in no sense guarantees that the service itself can continue. That must be a matter for the commercial decision of the operators. In any event, ring-fencing slots for specific services introduces the kind of rigidity into the slot allocation system that we believe would be wholly unwelcome.

I suspect that many regions would want the slots for their Heathrow services ring-fenced. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already had representations from places other than Teesside wanting ring-fencing. Incidentally, ring-fencing relates to slots at particular, specified times and not just an overall daily total. Clearly, if we were to respond to all those demands we would impose an intolerably restrictive regime at Heathrow.

One point that I often make when we consider this subject is that British Midland, for example, has managed to increase the proportion of slots that it holds at Heathrow from 3 per cent. in 1979 to 14 per cent. now. That has happened despite the existence of grandfather rights. Grandfather rights, however much they may seem to entrench existing users of slots, none the less provide a regime in which there is a regular changeover of operators, as individual operators respond to where they think market opportunities are and withdraw capacity from certain routes to make it available to others. The less we do to make rigid slot allocations the better. That will ultimately help airports such as Teesside, which will not be disadvantaged.

Teesside is not an especially isolated area. I always point out that there is an excellent train service which takes only two and a half hours to King's Cross on the east coast main line which, as my hon. Friend will know, has recently been improved through electrification at a cost of £550 million. In addition, both Newcastle and Leeds-Bradford airports are within 60 miles by road of the Teesside area and offer flights not only to Heathrow, but to other European destinations, such as Amsterdam or Paris.

It is too easy and too tempting to focus on Heathrow to the exclusion of all the facilities around London. Heathrow, as I said, is not the only London airport. Gatwick, Stansted and London City airport, which I always mention when I can, are excellent airports which offer excellent connecting flights to many international destinations.

My hon. Friend referred to the proposals for the demise of Cleveland county council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That is clearly a popular proposition in the House this evening. As my hon. Friend said, the Local Government Commission's draft recommendations for Cleveland and for Durham were put out to public consultation earlier this week. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other Transport Ministers have foreseen some complications for transport if shire counties are abolished, although their retention is not necessarily the best solution. I understand that Teeside airport is not specifically mentioned in the draft recommendations. I anticipate that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will draft regulations to cover issues such as the transfer of property rights and liabilities of any authorities that cease to exist. There are well-tried arrangements for transfers to successor local authorities. Meanwhile, if the airport company has any views, it should make them known to the Local Government Commission as part of the public consultation process.

My hon. Friend spoke about privatisation. The thrust of what both he and our hon. Friends asked was why we did not require local authorities to dispose of their airport interests. I know that my hon. Friend is an assiduous reader of *Hansard*, so he will know that I answered a question tabled by our hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on precisely that subject earlier this week. We have made no secret of the fact that we want to encourage local authorities to sell their airport interests. We believe that privatisation would bring benefits to local authority airports, as it has brought benefits elsewhere. We believe that it would encourage enterprise and efficiency and that it would enable airports to build on the advantages that the creation of the public airport companies provided. We believe, too, that the private sector has the resources and the willingness to invest in local authority airports on a far greater scale than we have seen so far. The British Airports Authority was privatised in 1987 and it has gone from strength to strength since. It has maintained a high level of investment, not just in the south-east, but in Scotland, too.

The Government have helped Teesside airport over the years by issuing borrowing approval to its controlling authorities for operational investment in the airport. However, with the increasing pressure on public expenditure, we are simply unable to maintain our support for investment in local authority airports on anything like the scale of recent years. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear, in his announcement following the autumn statement, that the amount of public expenditure provision available for local authority airports in the future will be limited—only £12 million this year—and that his first priority will be to enable airports to make necessary safety and security-related investment.

[Mr. Norris]

My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh referred to development proposals for the unused land at Teesside. My Department has not seen any development proposals involving opening access to the south side of the airport, and I can well understand that the cost of roads and other infrastructure there could be substantial. I know that the airport company is discussing with the county councils the possibility of their providing the access road and services. For the sort of scheme which the airport company is thinking about, the best course may be for a joint venture project to be established with the private sector to take that development project forward. In any event, there is no prospect of development of that sort being funded through supplementary credit approvals for the airport company.

We believe that it is for the local authorities which own airports to decide whether to dispose of their interests, taking into account the needs of those who live in the areas involved and the customers who use the airport. In taking those decisions, local authority shareholders will be aware that, if they want their airports to continue to develop, they will need to use internal resources or look to the private sector to fund major expansion. We have talked on many occasions about joint venture companies. In other cases, the private sector may be able to provide a specific facility, instead of the airport company. In many cases, the best approach will be simply the sale of majority holdings in public airport companies.

My hon. Friend made the important point that there is the temporary relaxation in the rules for the use of capital receipts which applies to the proceeds of the sale of shares in public airport companies. That provides a particular attraction to them in selling now. We greatly welcome the fact that the major shareholders in East Midlands airport have decided to test the market for their shares.

I have a great deal of sympathy—as I know my hon. Friends have—with what my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh said about Teesside airport. I pay tribute to the concern that he has expressed on this subject over a long period. I hope that Teesside and other airports will recognise the considerable opportunities and advantages that are available to them from pursuing the sort of policies which my hon. Friend has outlined this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the death of Robert James Adley, Esquire, Member for Christchurch. I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss that we have sustained. We send our sympathy to the relatives of the hon. Member.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
Read a Second time, and committed.

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read to be read a Second time on Monday 17 May at Seven o'clock.

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 May.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 4) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed on Thursday 20 May.

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Abuse

1. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the results of the independent research he has commissioned on the use of video-recorded evidence in child abuse cases; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Jack): We expect to receive the results in January 1995.

Mr. French: Is my hon. Friend aware that, up to last month, there were only seven examples of the use of video evidence in child abuse cases? Does he agree that this form of evidence giving not only enhances the prospect of a safe conviction, but involves minimum extra trauma for the children concerned? Will he seek to promote it, and also consider its relevance to other offences—for example, rape?

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue. I know that he has campaigned assiduously in his constituency. Let me update him: pre-recorded pre-trial interviews with children have now been presented as evidence in 22 cases, and to date none has been refused. I assure my hon. Friend that we are considering the development of this important way of giving evidence. A new pack has been issued to help and educate children in the act of giving witness evidence; once we know more about this method—which is the aim of the report—we shall consider extending it in due course.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister pass my congratulations to his interdepartmental team, and in particular to the Department of Health? They have done some very good work.

Will the Minister go a step further? Does he accept that there is a great deal of concern about the disparate quality of research? Will he try to pull the research together in a national centre, and perhaps set up regional centres for both abusers and, more important, the abused? If he were prepared to do that—or, at least, to undertake to review the policy—he would bring great relief to the hundreds of thousands of victims of child and, indeed, sexual abuse, whose lives are being blighted.

Mr. Jack: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his responsible attitude to this development, which is a product of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I know from my visits to, for example, the Kent police's vulnerable victims suite that many police forces are now developing a particularly sympathetic and careful way of dealing with such evidence, and I am sure that they will discover more cases of child abuse as a result. Much of what has been done now needs to be evaluated; during that excercise, I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Riddick: The use of video-recorded evidence is, of course, very helpful, but would it not also be beneficial to abolish the right to silence in child abuse cases? That would also be useful in terrorism cases. Is it not time that juries were allowed to draw an inference from a suspect's

refusal to say where he was or what he was doing at a certain time? The innocent will have nothing to hide. Is not the right to silence the criminal's best friend?

Mr. Jack: I know from earlier exchanges how many right hon. and hon. Members are troubled about that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has received a copy of the report by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which deals with some of the issues. Although the report reached no firm conclusions, we have read it carefully and will consider its findings, together with the Royal Commission on criminal justice, whose report will doubtless include comment on the important point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Women-only Bus Services

2. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the provision of women-only bus services operated in the evening.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend is always anxious to encourage initiatives such as this which seek to address the problems of crime and the fear of crime.

Mr. Cryer: If the Home Secretary is so anxious about providing evening-only services for women such as the Homerunner bus service in Bradford, which has had to be withdrawn, why does he not provide a grant, which has been provided for about three years? The sum of £18,000 will get that bus back on the road and provide 300 or so women each week who use the bus service with a safe service once again. That would be about the cost of the Home Secretary's chauffeur-driven car—looking at the right hon. and learned Gentleman's figure, I think that he could do with the exercise. He should cancel the car and donate the money to keep the women of Bradford safe.

Mr. Jack: As I am sure we shall see later, my right hon. and learned Friend is a man who is light on his feet. In fairness, the safer cities project in Bradford has been generous with its support. We originally gave a grant of £24,500 to the project in January 1990, on the proviso that funding would be raised locally. As it was not, a second grant was given in 1991 to do the same thing. To help still further, a third grant of £18,000 was given in 1992. We have bent over backwards to sustain the service, which is caught up in the general debate in Bradford about safer cities. On 12 March 1993 the *Telegraph and Argus* stated that we should not allow the momentum generated by the Bradford safer cities projects to be lost. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support that view.

Police Duties

4. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to monitor the amount of policemen's time spent on beat duty, administrative and other matters.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The Government have encouraged and assisted police forces to introduce standard activity sampling as a way of monitoring the time that police officers spend on beat duty, administrative and other matters. In addition, as I announced last week, we are launching an urgent study into ways of reducing the paperwork burden on the police.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his reply, and I recognise that the Government are trying to make strides in that area. My constituents in Dover and Deal, and the many country villages, want see policemen on the streets—they want them to be a visible presence. They want to see the bobby back on the beat. Will my right hon. and learned Friend make every effort possible to ensure that bobbies are not tied down by administrative work in the police station?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in his analysis of what his constituents would like to see. I am pleased to be able to remind him that Kent police have the highest proportion of their policemen on beat and patrol duty of any provincial force bar Surrey—they already have a good record.

The reason that I decided to institute a study of the paperwork burden on the police service was to ensure that we could reduce to the necessary minimum the amount of time spent behind desks carrying out paper-related duties when arrests and prosecutions take place. We want to ensure that the biggest proportion of police time is spent on beat and patrol duty, with the police visible to the public of Kent and elsewhere.

Mr. Miller: I am sure that the Home Secretary will share the concerns expressed on both sides of the House about the increasing levels of serious crime, especially in areas such as my own in Cheshire. Against that background, will the Home Secretary state why the head of the regional crime squad in Cheshire, Detective Superintendent Holt, together with Detective Sergeant Goulding and Detective Constable Lamble are currently confined to desk duties? Will the Home Secretary ensure that every effort is made to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion as it not only affects public confidence in the force, but relates to matters that appear to imply a serious miscarriage of justice?

Mr. Clarke: Obviously, the individual disposition of officers is a matter for the chief constable, not me, but I shall make inquiries into the present status of the case in Cheshire referred to by the hon. Gentleman and write to him if I can give him any up-to-date information. It is sometimes necessary to suspend officers or confine them to desk duties when allegations are made against them. I am extremely concerned that, when they occur, investigations should be carried out as rapidly as possible and fairly. I am always anxious to ensure that such complaints and disciplinary measures are brought to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

I have already put out a consultative document about disciplinary procedures in the police force. Although parts of it are controversial, most people agree that it is wrong from the point of view both of the public and of the police officers concerned that the process should become too protracted and legalistic and come to no conclusion for too long.

Mrs. Angela Knight: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the difficulties that the Derbyshire police force has to bear as a consequence of adverse decisions taken by the county council. Does he agree that his proposals to allow greater freedom for both police

authorities and chief constables will result in more bobbies on the beat, which is what my constituents in Erewash want?

Mr. Clarke: We have proposed stronger police authorities than there have been hitherto. I think that Derbyshire shows the need for a stronger police authority than its county council has been able to provide. We have also proposed that those stronger police authorities and chief constables should have far more discretion in how they deploy their resources. I am sure that, when these and the other reforms come into effect, the chief constable of Derbyshire, his force and the police authority will respond to the wish of the people of Derbyshire for a visible police presence on patrol, providing a sense of security and effective protection against crime for the people of Erewash and elsewhere.

Mr. Blair: Is not one part of ensuring that there are more police men and women on the beat, which is what everyone wants, the need to build in proper incentives and esteem for the police constables who will be carrying out this duty? Will the Home Secretary therefore undertake, as part of the inquiry being conducted by Sir Patrick Sheehy, to ensure that such incentives are built into the terms and conditions of employment of police, so that more of them are encouraged to go on the beat?

Mr. Clarke: I have had only informal contacts with Sir Patrick and his colleagues throughout the inquiry, because it is an independent inquiry, but I have given him my views on a number of subjects—views identical to those just expressed by the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that Sir Patrick and his team will bear them in mind when coming to their conclusions. It is important that rewards be distributed fairly to reflect the responsibilities borne by officers, and that the responsibilities of beat and patrol officers, whom the public rate most highly of all, be properly taken into account in the rewards system.

Parental Responsibility

5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department has taken to make parents more accountable for the behaviour of their children.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: From 1 October last year, courts have new powers to bind over the parents of offenders under the age of 16, order parents to attend court with their children and to pay their children's fines.

Mr. Arnold: Is it not wrong that a tiny minority of parents allow their children to run riot, to the detriment of their neighbours and of other victims? Is not punishing the parents for the crimes of their children a deterrent and a way of making them face up to their responsibilities? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that describing these measures as "punishing the innocent" as the Opposition did when voting against them, is wholly wrong?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, many parents are decent people who do their best with their children but, for one reason or another, they cannot retain control of a child that becomes delinquent. The courts will not impose penalties on such parents. There are also parents, however, who neglect the behaviour of their children and just assume that it is up to the police and the courts to protect the public from them. I therefore think that one of the best features of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, about which I shall be making a statement in a few moments, was the fact that it gave these powers to the courts. It is indeed ridiculous that this was about the only part of the Act that the Opposition chose to oppose.

Mr. Maclennan: Would the Home Secretary take time to familiarise himself with the Scottish system for dealing with offenders which, through the children's panels, involves parents closely from the beginning of a case and appears to have rather greater success than the English juvenile courts system in preventing recidivism?

Mr. Clarke: I was in Scotland yesterday afternoon and evening, and overnight until this morning. I took the opportunity of doing a little public sounding of my own among the Scotsmen and women whom I met. I apologise for the fact that my sample was not fully politically representative; but the Scottish children's panels have met a rather more mixed reaction than I would have expected. Not everyone agreed that the situation in Scotland is nearer perfection than it is here.

Obscene Publications Act 1959

6. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his current review of the operation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to be in a position to announce the conclusions of that exercise shortly. It will lay particular emphasis on ways in which the enforcement of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 can be made more effective.

Dr. Spink: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and I am pleased that he is considering ways to prevent that degrading material from escaping the law. How will his review impact on "Juliet", a book which our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described recently as "truly horrifying" and which the Attorney-General refused to prosecute because of the deficiencies in the 1959 Act?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has taken a leading part in drawing the attention of the House to such matters and will know that they are for the Crown Prosecution Service. I remind him that, in 1991, there were 218 successful prosecutions under section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act. As far as the weight of our review is concerned, we want to hit the pockets of pornographers hard, and to make the operation of the Act more effective. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, however, a full-scale review of all the problems of the 1959 Act, which my hon. Friend knows well, is not necessarily the best way to achieve what he wants.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister accept that obscenity, in its widest sense, also includes violence? As he knows, the dissemination of violence is widespread, especially through television programmes—many of which are broadcast before the watershed—and soaps, which broadcast incest, murder and all sorts of violence as though they were part of everyday living. That sort of obscenity also needs to be examined in the context of his review. Now that more than 100 Members from many parts of the House have signed

an early-day motion calling for an inquiry into the link between television violence and violence in society, does he not think that that sort of review is urgently needed?

Mr. Jack: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noted from public statements made by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary that we take what he said very seriously, and I associate myself with those comments. Yesterday, I was in discussion with the Video Standards Council, which said much the same as the hon. Member. One of the little known facts about the 1959 Act is that the term "corrupt and deprave" can apply equally to violence and to pornographic material.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: While I note that my hon. Friend and his Department have resisted calls for a fundamental review of the 1959 Act and are merely considering its enforcement, will he take it from me that that will not bring about the success—a change in the law—that he has said he wants? Does he accept that he will have to review the test of obscenity in the 1959 Act, that unless he does so no other legislation will be as strong as he would wish, and that it is about time that the Government undertook a fundamental review and brought before the House changes to improve and strengthen the outdated and flawed Obscene Publications Act?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right to use the word "outdated" in her question. Because of the exhibition that she helped to stage in the House, she knows that pornography is being disseminated by new high-tech means and by information technology, and those are the areas that we must hit hard; improving the effectiveness of the operation of the 1959 Act is one of the best ways to deal with that. She will also know that the Government have a long-standing commitment that, if someone introduced workable alternative through private Members' legislation—the 1959 Act was such a piece of private Members' legislation—we would consider it very carefully.

Police Reorganisation

8. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had in relation to the reorganisation of police forces in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): None, because my right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to reorganise police forces in Wales.

Mr. Morgan: Following last week's election results, which removed from Tory control all but one of the shire counties in England—almost as good as Wales, where we have been a Tory-shire-county-free zone since 1981—can the Home Secretary assure the House that he will not seek to take petty revenge on the electorate by removing all forms of democratic accountability from police forces when the boundaries are reorganised? How does he propose to align the boundaries of police authorities with the new boundaries of the unitary authorities as and when we get them in Wales—or is he going to tell the House that the only form of democratic accountability that he sees in the future for police forces in Wales and in England is his own, larger-than-life personality?

Mr. Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary set out his proposals for the membership of police authorities in the statement that he made to the House on 23 March. The hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has proposed a single tier of unitary authorities, which fall within the existing police areas, except in one instance where it crosses the boundaries of Gwent and South Wales. We shall have to consider in due course whether to adjust police areas to match new local government boundaries.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that the greater flexibility and freedom proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has been warmly welcomed by the chief constable of Dyfed-Powys? In considering what the force areas should be, will he give attention to the importance of smaller forces, particularly the Dyfed-Powys force which, according to figures recently published by the Home Office, has the best clear-up rate in the country?

Mr. Wardle: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The Dyfed-Powys force stands at the top of the league of clear-up rates for the whole of England and Wales. He may have seen—as I have been made aware of it—the chief constable's paper on the size of police forces. In his statement on 23 March, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary proposed to simplify the statutory procedures by which forces can be amalgamated. He made it clear that he has no fixed, preconceived ideas about either the right number or the right size of police forces.

Mr. Michael: Perhaps the Minister can explain why the Home Secretary wants an accelerated process to deal with police mergers. We do not believe that his intentions are so innocent. Will the Minister accept that, after a 121 per cent. increase in crime under the Conservatives in Wales and in England, the last thing that the police or the public want is the diversion of a major reorganisation? They certainly do not want police authorities chaired by right-wing commissars parachuted in by ministerial decree. Will the Minister give priority to supporting the police, local authorities and communities in their efforts to reduce crime and to fight crime, and note that the smallest forces—not just Dyfed-Powys but Gwent—have the best clear-up rates?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the increase in crime in 1992 in Wales was marginally less than the average for England and Wales as a whole. He spoke about the procedures that alllow amalgamations. I hope that he has done his homework and looked at the legislation introduced in the 1960s, which makes the approach to any such amalgamation proposals very complex. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend proposes to simplify those procedures, and he will deal with possible amalgamations as and when they should arise. The hon. Gentleman forgets that the proposals for the reform of the police service are aimed at strengthening the ability of police forces to protect the public, to prevent crime where they can do so and to tackle crime when it occurs.

New Age Travellers

9. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department have taken to tackle the problem of new age travellers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We propose to strengthen section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 to give the police stronger powers to prevent invasions by travellers and new powers to enable them to prevent illegal rave parties.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend will be aware that my constituents in Gloucestershire will be glad to hear that news. I informed him as long ago as the last May bank holiday weekend that we had a rave party in Lechlade, which cost the taxpayer well over £100,000; we had another invasion by travellers last weekend, which cost taxpayers over £200,000. My constituents in Gloucestershire barricade their homes and their land to prevent such huge invasions. Is he aware that they are now looking to the Government to take action to amend section 39 of the Public Order Act?

Mr. Wardle: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the distress caused by large rowdy gatherings of travellers and ravers whose selfish behaviour intrudes on other people's private lives, but I hope that he acknowledges that there have been two key developments since last summer. First, as my right hon. and learned Friend has announced, we intend to strengthen the Public Order Act and apply it to a wider range of circumstances. We also propose to give the police new powers to protect local communities from illegal gatherings. Secondly, the Association of Chief Police Officers has established two co-ordination centres for intelligence gathering on travellers, and has made arrangements for much closer liaison and mutual aid to tackle just such problems. Those centres were put to good effect in the Cotswolds during the bank holiday weekend at the beginning of May.

Mr. Trimble: Does the Minister appreciate that problems with raves are not confined to those that take place in the open air, but also affect those that take place on certain premises? The existing licensing legislation and the penalties connected therewith are wholly inadequate and need to be greatly strengthened.

Mr. Wardle: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. He will be aware that another piece of legislation is involved there, but if he cares to make representations they will be listened to carefully in the Home Department.

Car Crime

10. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what innovation his Department is considering to tackle car crime.

Mr. Jack: My advisory committee on car crime is looking at devising new ways to encourage a greater take-up of car security systems. Those efforts will be supported by the continuation of our successful car crime prevention campaign.

Mr. Whittingdale: Is my hon. Friend aware that immobiliser devices such as those produced by the Immobiliser group in Chelmsford are proving extremely effective in preventing car crime and are also now affordable? Does he agree that if more motorists spent a few extra pounds installing such devices that would have a major impact in reducing car crime?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend succinctly underlines one of the key messages that helped to make car crime prevention year a success. At the start of the year, car crime was rising at a rate of 18 per cent. but by the end of the year the rate of increase had dropped to 3 per cent. and the increase in thefts of cars—immobilisers are relevant to that statistic—was only 1 per cent. We are now renewing our campaign and I am sure that that message will form a key part of it.

Mr. Faulds: Why can the car industry itself not make a greater contribution to the prevention of car crime?

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman had been with me at the fleet motor show recently he would have seen that most of the models now available in the United Kingdom come fitted with alarms, immobilisers and other security devices. Those are extremely effective and major buyers such as fleet users are seeing great success when they purchase cars with such equipment.

Mr. Sykes: Is my hon. Friend aware that recently on television a member of the North Yorkshire probation service referred to the prisoners in her charge as "clients"? Should we not stop listening to the so-called experts and start doling out punishments that fit the crime rather than the criminal?

Mr. Jack: I assume that behind my hon. Friend's question is the idea of the persistent young car thief. The Home Secretary's announcement that he will introduce a secure training order to deal with persistent young criminals, many of whom are car thieves, goes to the heart of my hon. Friend's question.

Crime and Unemployment

11. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate new studies into the causes of crime and its relationship to unemployment.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): Work on that subject was covered in the Home Office research study, "Trends in crime and their interpretation", published in 1990 and I have no current plans for fresh research in that area.

Mr. Skinner: I regard that as shocking complacency on the part of the Government. Everyone knows that young men and women are without jobs; there are 500,000 of them on schemes and a further 500,000 waiting to leave school who cannot be motivated by their teachers because they know that their brothers and sisters have not had a job for four or five years. Is it any wonder that in our area people still repeat the old adage that the devil makes work for idle hands? It is time that the Government got back to full employment or made way for a party that will create employment.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) gets carried away as he expresses his own prejudices rather than the truth. The study made it perfectly clear—I quote from the introduction by Dr. Simon Field—that the fluctuations in the total numbers of unemployed persons appear to be independent of the fluctuation in the number of offences. I will give the hon.

Gentleman an example that will appeal to his hon. Friends. When unemployment fell by 6 per cent. under the Conservatives in 1970-74, reported crime rose by 6 per cent. per year. When the Labour Government that followed the Conservative Government in 1974-79 saw unemployment rise by 17 per cent., reported crime increased by only 4 per cent. I expect the hon. Gentleman to tell me next that Labour unemployment is not merely better than Conservative unemployment, but is better than Conservative recovery as well.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my hon. Friend reject once and for all the absurd myth that there is a direct link between unemployment and the rise in crime? Bearing in mind that before the war there was far greater poverty and unemployment, and far less crime, will he apply his mind much more to the real reasons, which are the breakdown in family life and, not least, the continual flouting of authority which is so much encouraged by Opposition Members?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right, although I am sure that individual unemployment can be a precipitating factor in individual cases, and that areas of multiple deprivation are huge impediments to normal law-abiding life. These are complicated problems, which we are seeking to tackle with inner city programmes, most particularly city challenge. When one considers the people who have been convicted and are in prison, what strikes one particularly is the large proportion who have been in care. Up to 40 per cent. of young offenders in prison have been in care, compared with 2 per cent. of the population as a whole, and 30 per cent. of them were consistently truanting in their last years at school. Most of them, however, have had a job, although I have no doubt at all that for the large minority who have not a large part of the reason is that they think that honest work is a mug's game.

Ms Ruddock: No one on this side of the House deems that unemployment is any excuse for crime, but the Minister's last reply gave more considered attention to this issue. Is he aware that in London, in the poorest areas and those with highest unemployment, such as Southwark, Lambeth and Hackney, there are indeed the highest crime rates, particularly for robberies and burglaries? How does he respond to deputy assistant commissioner Roach of the Metropolitan police, who said:

"Crime trends are largely determined by social factors . . . over which the police have very little influence"?

I suggest that the Government have much control over many of those social factors and that it is time that they attended to them and really exerted some influence towards reducing the crime rate, particularly in the capital.

Mr. Lloyd: What is perfectly clear—I will send the hon. Lady the research if she has not seen it—is that, despite all our efforts over the years to find a connection between unemployment and crime, we have not done so. Nevertheless, as I have said, I have no doubt that unemployment and many other factors play a part in individual tendencies to crime. It is too easy for Opposition Members to blame unemployment. It is a complex vicious circle and, as I said in reply to my hon. Friends, the whole range of factors, particularly in the deprived areas of inner cities, needs to be tackled as a whole. That is exactly what the Government's inner city programmes seek to do. There is no single answer. Unemployment is certainly not a prime cause or a direct cause of crime. To say that it is such a cause is an insult to those who are unemployed and who would never indulge in crime.

Sentencing

12. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the right to appeal against lenient sentences.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Most of the representations I receive on the right of appeal against lenient sentences, which was introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1988, are to indicate views on the outcome of particular cases.

Mr. Spring: Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that although the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) ludicrously tries to talk up his party as the party of law and order, the hon. Gentleman and his party voted against the measure? How can the British people take seriously Labour's pretension to support law and order when——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is calling into question the Opposition's policies. He must ask the Government about their policies, especially in relation to his substantive question.

Mr. Spring: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm the importance of ensuring that lenient sentences are referred and that we get the proper passing of sentences appropriate to the crime?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's sentiments. He is right to recall that it was this Government who introduced the new power and enabled an appeal to be made against unnecessarily lenient sentences. It was used recently most notably when there was widespread public feeling about the sentence first imposed on a 15-year-old for an offence of rape in south Wales. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General used his powers under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to go to the court and to get a proper sentence imposed. That power was introduced by this Government only a few years ago. My hon. Friend is right to recall that it was opposed by Opposition Members, including Opposition Front-Bench Members.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Is the Home Secretary aware that one of the main reasons why the courts have been concerned about lenient sentences is section 29 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which the Government brought into force last October? When the Home Secretary gave evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, he said that he did not intend to review the provision until a year had passed. Is not it the case that if he now intends to review section 29 and if he now accepts that there is inadequacy in the legislation that his Government passed to deal with crime, it is only because strong pressure to be tough on crime has come from the Opposition? Again, he has shown complacency.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) has just pointed out that the Labour party ferociously opposed the prosecution's right to appeal against sentences. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) pointed out that Labour opposed the power of the court in the 1991 Act to take parents before the courts and to make them liable for the

fines of their children. Section 29 of the 1991 Act was one of the measures to which the Opposition raised no opposition and which they supported. It is not working as Parliament intended. I have been saying for months that I intend to put the matter right as soon as I can. If the hon. Gentleman stays in the Chamber for about 20 minutes, he may get news which puts his mind at rest on the question.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is Labour which has opposed every major piece of criminal justice legislation in the past 14 years?

Madam Speaker: Order. Some hon. Members will never learn. If the hon. Gentleman can ask a supplementary question that is in order, I shall of course want to hear him. I have selected him to speak.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a bit rich for Labour——

Madam Speaker: Order, I shall pass on. I selected the hon. Gentleman because he has a substantive question on the Order Paper and I thought that he might like to follow it up. I hope that he will understand if I now call Mr. Spellar.

Prisons (Private Security Firms)

13. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operation of prisons and the transport of prisoners by private security firms.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Private sector involvement in the Prison Service is designed to improve standards across the whole prison system.

Mr. Spellar: Has the Minister any comment on the death of Mr. Hogg in custody? Has he any comments on the use of untrained drivers by Group 4? What qualifications has Group 4 for the job, apart from its association with the chairman of the Conservative party? Can the Minister further confirm whether the Metropolitan police have been instructed not to tender for certain categories of jobs such as the transfer of prisoners in London? When will he drop the prejudice, sack Group 4 and let the job be undertaken by the professionals?

Mr. Lloyd: I will not say anything about Mr. Hogg other than that I regret very much—as does Group 4—his death, which is being investigated by the police and by the Prison Service. The hon. Gentleman has referred to Group 4. Its escorts have been conveying a thousand prisoners a week for the past six weeks, after a very unfortunate start —I accept that—for everyone but the cartoonists and the knee-jerk reactionaries on the Opposition Benches, when Group 4 lost eight prisoners in the first three weeks, of whom three at least did not escape due to its error. Group 4 has been doing its difficult and demanding job with increasing efficiency. Last year in that area the police and the Prison Service lost at least 30 prisoners, so Group 4 has a long way to go in losing prisoners before it catches up with the public sector. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lloyd: Opposition Members should restrain their laughter and note that Group 4 is releasing up to 150 highly trained police officers for operational duties in the public interest. Group 4 ought to continue and make a success of its work; only the anti-private sector vendetta of Opposition Members would be served by the cancellation of its contract.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the levels of compensation paid out under the citizens charter demonstrate its effectiveness? Does he further agree that the moves to agency status and contracting out are the best way of achieving value for money? Does he also agree that it is not surprising that all those measures have been resisted by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: As to the last part of my hon. Friend's question, I am unsurprised.

Paying compensation is popular with those who use public services. I also believe that it is right that compensation should be paid when service is bad. It provides a satisfactory discipline on the public services. As regards contracting out, I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. It has brought great benefits both to those who use public services and, critically, to those who pay for public services.

Mr. John Smith: Since the opposition of the whole teaching profession to the imposition of tests this year has been reinforced by the overwhelming vote by members of the National Union of Teachers in favour of a boycott, will the Prime Minister now do the sensible thing and suspend compulsory tests this year?

The Prime Minister: I was very sad this morning to see the result of the vote by the National Union of Teachers, which was the only teacher association not to welcome the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education on Tuesday. A lot of people will be asking whether that union really supports the principle of regular testing in our schools or whether another agenda concerns it. I very much trust that the NUT will reflect on what my right hon. Friend said.

Mr. Smith: As the Secretary of State for Education was forced to concede that there were flaws in the tests, which is why he climbed down about next year, why on earth is the Prime Minister forcing children to take the tests this year?

The Prime Minister: What should be called off are the unprofessional and utterly futile boycott threats. Teachers should do what the majority of parents want—co-operate in helping to make the tests work this year and in future years.

On the second point of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question, he will recall that he has asked me that before. Ron Dearing has made it absolutely clear that he needs the experience of this year's tests to redesign them satisfactorily for the future.

Mr. Smith: As there is overwhelming opposition to compulsory tests this year, from parents as well as teachers and governors, why does the Prime Minister not show a glimmer of common sense and end the farce now? If he is not listening to parents and teachers, whom is he listening to? Does he not understand that to be so foolishly stubborn is a sign of weakness and not of strength?

The Prime Minister: It is common sense to proceed with tests so that we can correct them and get them right in the future. Testing in schools is vital to measure the progress of the pupils concerned. The Opposition may wriggle, but that happens to be the reality. I hope that even, at this late stage, teachers will realise the importance to pupils of having these tests, the importance to the reform of testing of having those tests and the importance to the dignity of the profession of teaching in not proceeding with industrial action at the expense of schools.

Mr. Gorst: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the Conservative Government came to office in 1979 membership of trade unions has fallen by 28 per cent? Will my right hon. Friend say whether he believes this is due to their being a growing anachronism, badly led, or merely because of their limpet-like, hand-in-glove connection with the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly not inclined to disagree with any of my hon. Friend's points. Trade union membership does continue to decline and is substantially lower than it was a decade or so ago. I notice that many of the unions still sponsor right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench and resist suggestions that they should abandon the out-dated block vote in favour of one member, one vote. It is a case of he who pays the piper calls the tune, and on this, too, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is wriggling.

Q2. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burden: The Prime Minister will probably have heard that his right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said that he regrets

"that inflation got out of control at the end of the 1980s."

Would the Prime Minister care to enlighten the House as to what jobs he was doing at the end of the 1980s?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had cared to research very carefully, he would have known that we have made it clear on a number of occasions that after the 1987 stock exchange crash we reduced interest rates faster than, with hindsight, we thought was correct, and that contributed to inflation. The hon. Gentleman will also know that, at that time, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) both invited us to cut interest rates further and faster and that that would have put inflation up even more. The hon. Gentleman should do his research more accurately.

Q3. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jessel: As the economy and business confidence have, under the Conservative Government, begun to improve—especially since Britain left the exchange rate mechanism—will my right hon. Friend give further support to business confidence by making it clear that the United Kingdom will not return to fixed exchange rates?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, and as I made clear earlier this year, we will not consider rejoining the ERM before important conditions have been met, in particular the requirement that German and United Kingdom monetary policies must be much more closely aligned before we can begin to consider whether it would be appropriate for Britain to rejoin. Clearly those conditions are unlikely to be satisfied soon.

Q4. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barnes: Some people still believe in the ultimate objective of a multi-ethnic democratic society, with full minority rights, for the former Yugoslavia. Included among them are many of the people of Yugoslavia who bravely stand out against violence and intimidation. Why do we not listen to some of their ideas for the extension of safe havens and United Nations border controls? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that not everyone in Yugoslavia is a supporter of paramilitarism and war lords?

The Prime Minister: We have indicated on a number of occasions in the House the way in which we think it is right for us to proceed at the moment. We have made that clear and we have said that we believe that it is right to continue to pursue a political settlement, without which no settlement can stick in the long term even though perhaps for a short while it might be held. We have made it clear that we believe that it is right to proceed with sanctions, and we have not ruled out the use of force, should that prove necessary, in selected circumstances.

Q5. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as economic growth strengthens and as our improved competitiveness, particularly in manufacturing, makes its impact, that will increasingly be appreciated by the voters, who will also note the nature of the Opposition parties —one inextricably tied to the big unions and big bureaucracy and the other without roots and no more than the scavengers of British politics?

The Prime Minister: Things have certainly been difficult for many companies and people throughout the recession. I understand that and have acknowledged it on a number of occasions. I believe that as recovery comes through, many of those people will see that it would not have come through unless we had taken the right decisions to get inflation down and keep it down for the future.

We can now see that manufacturing output is turning up, that manufacturing productivity is at record levels, that exports of manufactures are at record levels and that, according to the Confederation of British Industry,

optimism in manufacturing industry has reached a 10-year high. They are very welcome signs. We are clearly coming out of recession in the right circumstances for sustained growth over a long period.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: When the right hon. Gentleman took the decision to withhold the helicopter carrier order from Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, he will have known that he was bringing shipbuilding on Tyneside to an end, so he will not be surprised to learn that at 1 o'clock today Swan Hunter called in the receivers and 6,000 people are now to lose their jobs on Tyneside. Will the Prime Minister help my constituents by telling them where they will find alternative work?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Gentleman knows that, of the two tenders submitted, that submitted by VSEL at Barrow was many tens of millions of pounds below the tender submitted by Swan Hunter. I understand the difficulties faced by Swan Hunter and, because I know of those difficulties, I agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to bring forward that tender earlier than we would otherwise have done to see whether Swan Hunter could satisfactorily win the tender in open competition. I regret that it did not, but I am not in a position to reject a tender many tens of millions of pounds below that of the alternative tender.

The answer to the substantive second part of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is that it is precisely because we are concerned about the employment prospects on Tyneside that we yesterday announced a range of measures to help, including a new enterprise zone, a new English Estates development in conjunction with the city council and the development corporation, more services from the Tyneside training and enterprise council and employment services, confirmation that Newcastle and South Tyneside will remain a development area, and extra resources for the Tyne and Wear development corporation for industrial sites.

I invite Opposition Members who scoffed when I mentioned the enterprise zone to look at other parts of the country that have faced similar difficulties in the past to see how effective that has been. They might, for example, recall the great difficulties at Shotton 10 years ago. If they go back to Shotton today, they will find a modern estate with high-paid, permanent, high-tech, secure jobs for just as many people as once worked in the steel industry there.

Q6. **Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ancram: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as well as the optimism to which he referred in yesterday's CBI survey, there are also real indications of growth and increased investment in most of the regions of the United Kingdom, including the south-west? Given that after three hard years of recession most people in my constituency, and elsewhere, want to see real, tangible proof of recovery, as well as promises of recovery, does my right hon. Friend welcome the report as a true indication of recovery which even Opposition Members cannot deny?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do welcome the report and I hope that that encouraging trend will continue in the months ahead. It is encouraging that businesses right across the country themselves expect to grow strongly in the months immediately ahead of us—in the south-west, certainly, but also in the south-east, the midlands and right across the land. What we in the House all want, I think, without exception, is to see that growth translated into jobs and into money in the family pay packet.

Q7. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Prime Minister accept that the campaign by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to transfer payments from post offices to banks is totally inimical to the interests of those who live in rural communities? Will he ask the Secretary of State to call off that campaign? Does he further recognise that the privatisation of the Post Office will damage rural post offices and delivery services? Rather than postpone privatisation, will he now abandon it?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) last week, I believe, we have made no such proposals. Our policy is to encourage people to receive benefits via their accounts while maintaining a viable network of post office outlets.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Time is up. Statement, Mr. Secretary Clarke.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order come after statements.

Criminal Justice

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the criminal justice system.

The House will recall that on 14 April it gave an unopposed Second Reading to the Criminal Justice Bill dealing with money laundering and other financial crimes. That Bill had already been considered in another place.

The House of Lords authorities had taken a narrow view on what was within the scope of the Bill. At the time of Second Reading in this House, I explained that I had been advised that we would therefore be unable to use the Bill to improve the working of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

However, two days ago I was told that the authorities of the House of Commons might take a different view. I therefore might now have an unexpected and welcome opportunity to bring before the House in this Session of Parliament amendments to give effect to commitments that I have already made to amend the 1991 Act. That Act is plainly not working as Parliament would have liked, and it is clearly in the interests of justice that I should move to put matters right quickly, now that I do have this welcome opportunity.

Subject to the approval of the appropriate authorities in the House, therefore, I intend to table amendments to the present Criminal Justice Bill which will deal with the problems of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and also strengthen the powers of the courts in other important respects.

First, we will seek to amend section 1 of the 1991 Act so as to allow the courts to take into account all the offences for which the offender is being dealt with, instead of only one offence, or that offence and one other offence, which is the case now.

Secondly, we propose to restore to the courts their power to have full regard to the criminal record of an offender and his response to previous sentences when deciding on the sentence for his current offences. We will do this by repealing section 29 of the 1991 Act, which prevents a court from regarding an offence as more serious by reason of any previous convictions of the offender, or his failure to respond to previous sentences.

These changes, which I wish to see made to the 1991 Act, will make it clear that sentencers have all reasonable discretion to decide upon the right sentence in a particular case, bearing in mind the seriousness of the offences being dealt with, all the circumstances of the offender and his offending behaviour.

We will ensure that the law allows the courts to exercise judgment and common sense within a sensible legal framework that allows justice to be done in the interest of the public, the victim and the offender.

So far as fines are concerned, I am quite satisfied that courts should continue to have regard to the particular circumstances of individual offenders—in particular, to their means to pay—when fixing the level of a fine. I have been equally clear for some time, and I have frequently said, that we should not require magistrates' courts to go through the mechanistic provision currently required under the unit fine arrangements. My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), Minister of State in my Department, and I have been seeking for some time modifications that we might make to the rules of the unit fines scheme to produce better results. We have now concluded that it is not possible to do so.

Accordingly, I now propose to abolish the unit fines system and replace it with provisions which will require magistrates fully to consider an offender's means when imposing a fine but which will not require them to fine by application of any mathematical formula. *[Interruption.]* I get the sense that this change will be widely welcomed, not least by magistrates outside the House.

I will also—again, subject to the judgment of the House authorities—seek to table further amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill currently before the House which will give to the courts the statutory power to increase sentence for those who offend on bail. We will also be seeking to fulfil our undertaking to increase the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous or drunken driving from its present five years to a new maximum of 10 years' imprisonment.

There are many other improvements to the criminal justice system and the powers of the courts which I intend in due course to bring before the House. We are also awaiting the report of the Royal Commission on the criminal justice system. At this stage of this Session of Parliament, it would not be prudent to introduce more complex amendments to the law and new criminal offences which might require extended parliamentary debate. I hope to have an opportunity to introduce further criminal justice measures in fresh legislation in the reasonably near future.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): First, I welcome the Home Secretary's statement on the shambles of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. We are surprised, however, that he has not seen fit to make a statement specifically on the allegations that there has been illegal bugging of the conversations of the royal family—allegations that are directly relevant to criminal justice. I should like to put to the Home Secretary one question about this matter. Either the transcripts that are circulating are forgeries, in which case a serious offence of criminal fraud has almost certainly been committed, or they are genuine, in which case a gross intrusion of privacy by illegal—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If hon. Members were listening to the statement of the Secretary of State, they will remember the final paragraphs. Will the hon. Gentleman keep that in mind?

Mr. Blair: Either these transcripts are forgeries, in which case a serious offence of criminal fraud has almost certainly been committed, or they are genuine, in which case a gross intrusion of privacy by illegal means has taken place. In either event, given that the Home Secretary is responsible for both criminal justice and issues concerning the royal family, are not these matters ripe for serious and urgent investigation, irrespective of the position of the security services?

I should like now to deal with the Criminal Justice Act. Never have we seen so quick a collapse of Government policy, even for the present Government. In dealing with the worst abuses of the Act, the Home Secretary will have much support. I am surprised that he did not pay tribute to the private Members' Bills of my hon. Friends the Members for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) and for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham).

I should like to press him on one central matter. Having spent weeks, if not months, robustly telling us that the Criminal Justice Act had a lot to commend it, he now equally robustly tells us that he must scrap its central provisions. Does he not understand that the problem with which the Criminal Justice Act sought to deal is arbitrary and inconsistent sentencing, and that it is therefore important that he should not scrap the Act and leave a dreadful hole?

Is there not therefore now a clear and urgent need for proper sentencing guidelines? Otherwise, the very difficulties that gave rise to his predecessor's legislation and the reasons for his support will recur, and one ill thought out proposal will simply be replaced by another.

May I also ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman why he is not trying to deal with other abuses of the criminal justice system? First, does he know that, because of the rising scandal of delays and adjournments in the criminal courts, it takes six months or more for many cases to reach a hearing? Is it not high time that the operation of the courts was overhauled thoroughly and they were run not for the convenience of those who administer the system but in the interests of justice for those who use it?

Secondly, does he know that, according to his own figures, the number of cases discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service has risen by over 20 per cent. in a year? Is he aware of, and will he comment on, the concerns of the police and prosecution services that many cases are discontinued, not on public interest grounds or for lack of evidence but because of pressure on resources? Is that right?

Thirdly, is not one abuse of the system the treatment of victims? Why will the Home Secretary not support us in saying that the Crown Prosecution Service should be legally obliged, before dropping or amending charges, especially in cases of rape or assault, fully to consult the victim? Above all, will he confirm that the level of crime is such that only one in 23 cases ever results in a conviction or caution? Therefore, may I urge him once again to rethink his strategy on crime prevention and accept the advisory report that was published in his office two years ago?

There is little point in drawing attention, as the Home Secretary does, to the link between crime and drugs, and then cutting drug advisory posts. There is little use in worrying about the appalling rise in truancy, with tens of thousands playing truant every day, and cutting the funding for truancy officers in local authorities. There is little chance of young people learning self-respect when thousands of them have to leave school every year and face nothing better than a life on the dole.

May I tell the Home Secretary that there is a possibility of establishing a broad basis of action on criminal justice, but to do that the Government must learn not just to rectify sensibly the mistakes for which they were responsible in the past, but to think through a coherent policy for the future to fight both crime and its underlying causes, so that the plague that makes life hell for millions of people in local communities can be addressed with the seriousness of purpose which they desperately wish to see?

Mr. Clarke: I find the hon. Gentleman's choice of priorities in politics utterly absurd. We are considering extremely important matters about the powers of the courts to deal properly with offenders who appear before them. Yet he kicks off by making his first priority, presumably placed on behalf of the *Daily Mirror*, to try to sell rather sleazy royal books, asking me to inquire into ridiculous allegations for which he knows well that there is no shred of support. He is a tabloid politician, unable to turn his attention to serious criminal matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is among those who have been pressing me for legislation to address the 1991 Act. I have been saying for some time that I do not like the way the Act has been working. Most hon. Members and magistrates do not like the way it has been working. We can now take action to get it into the shape that it ought to have been.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has kept his head down on the subject. A few moments ago, he gave those warnings about arbitrary sentencing, which were used in the speeches of his hon. Friends when they supported the legislation which tried to put in place mechanistic constraints on the courts, which in practice, as we all know, have not worked out properly. If he can turn away from royal scandals, buggings and matrimonial quarrels, he will have a chance to decide how he will vote on some things which matter to real men and women throughout the country.

I assume from what the hon. Gentleman has said that he will support the changes which I propose to the 1991 Act. I wish I always had that docile acquiescence from my opposite number on everything I propose. He has not yet made up his mind about bail and whether he approves of the proposal that we give the courts the statutory power to increase the sentence of those who offend on bail. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Asil Nadir?"] Perhaps the thought that, when we get Mr. Asil Nadir back, we will give the court a power that it now lacks to add to the sentence if he is convicted and if he commits further offences while on bail will prompt Labour Members to support us, but hitherto they have not supported sensible propositions in this field at all.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield has not yet made up his mind whether to support the increased penalty for causing death by dangerous or drunken driving—we shall see where we get to on that proposal. He gave us his usual litany about how important it is to go back to the Morgan report and examine whether local authorities should have a statutory duty in crime prevention. As far as I can see, that is the only original insight into crime that the Labour party has had so far in its new guise.

When the hon. Gentleman says that cases are discontinued for lack of resources, he plainly ignores the amount of resources that we are putting into the police and criminal justice system. It may be the burden of paperwork which has been imposed on those who arrest, prosecute and take people from arrest to trial by various people with well-intentioned reforms over the years that needs to be addressed. That is why I have set up an inquiry into the matter—we look forward to the report. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the other matters to which he referred are not within my area, so I should not dilate on the drive that my right hon. Friend the Minister is having on truancy and the £10 million campaign that he has already carried forward.

Today, I have announced the next stage in a package of measures to give the courts a proper range of powers so that they can exercise their discretion, judgment, and mercy on occasions, as well as their proper regard for the public interest of others, when they deal with those who are brought before them. Labour Members have not given

[Mr. Clarke]

serious thought to the matter. Perhaps, when this Bill comes before the House, at least they will have the decency to allow it a reasonably quick passage in its amended form.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Government have done much to strengthen the criminal justice system by one of the largest increases ever in appointments of Her Majesty's judges to the High Court bench? Does he further agree that his statement to the House today, arising from his listening to his colleagues on the Conservative Benches and the public more generally, will do more to engender confidence in the criminal justice system than ever before?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reminder that we have strengthened the courts to deal with the weight of work before them—I am grateful for his support. His advice has been invaluable in our consideration of the way in which the Criminal Justice Act has been working. I look forward to having similarly constructive advice during the passage of this Bill and the other criminal justice Bills which we intend to introduce in due course.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Is it not utter gall on the part of the Home Secretary to attack the Opposition spokesman for seeking to catch headlines when the whole of this operation is designed to catch a headline, "Crackdown on Crime", in the face of escalating crime figures which are without parallel in our history? Is it not monstrous that he should bring forward a total reversal of policy, which was commended to the House only two years ago by another instant governing Home Secretary as the answer to the problem of inconsistency in sentencing, to further his own petty personal policies?—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Maclennan: At a time when the royal commission is reaching its final conclusions, the Home Secretary has the effrontery and lack of sense to introduce ill thought out measures at a time when he does not even know whether Parliament is allowed to consider them. Surely it is time that he sat on the back burner and allowed sensible debate to take place in the House.

Mr. Clarke: In response to the hon. Gentleman, I ask him to go away, lie down in a dark room, keep taking the tablets and think carefully about whether the Liberal Democrats have an opinion one way or the other on the merits of any of the proposals that I have just announced.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): The Home Secretary's announcement this afternoon will be warmly welcomed not only by my constituents but by the Police Federation and its members up and down the country. All hon. Members in the House, bar one or two, know that his common-sense decision to allow the courts access to previous criminal convictions must be right. I hope that it will help to put behind bars burglars who pester the private homes of all our constituents.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell us what proposals he has for restricting the bail granted to, in particular, young people, who often go through what the police regard as the revolving door of arrest, bail, further offending, bail and so on? How will that work?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who takes a close and continuing interest in matters connected with policing. I am happy to confirm that we will give the courts power to consider previous convictions, among other things.

The men and women we appoint to the bench, be they judges or magistrates, are expected to bring civilised common sense and judgment to their task. They must be allowed to examine all the relevant circumstances, the nature of the offence, the offender's background, whether he has committed crimes before and how he has responded to earlier sentences. They must bear those factors in mind when passing a sentence that matches the seriousness of the offences of which the offender is now guilty. I believe that that approach will be welcomed by serving police officers who take those whom they arrest to the courts, as well as by all right-thinking people who want justice to be done.

My hon. Friend also raised the extremely complex issue of the way in which out-of-control young people should be handled—for instance, how those who are currently given bail before being dealt with by the youth courts should be remanded. That question takes us into much more complicated areas. In many ways, I should like to present provisions related to the treatment of young people in the form of amendments to this year's Criminal Justice Bill. We are now in May, however; I have been given the unexpected and welcome news that the proposed amendments are acceptable, but I think that we shall have to wait for later legislation to tackle such a complex matter properly, thus satisfying the legitimate public concerns voiced by my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I welcome the abolition of the unit fines system, but will the Home Secretary now apply his mind to the victims of the massive escalation of crime by funding victim support properly and on a proper basis, funding the youth service which literally keeps young people off the streets and recognising that local authorities can play a legitimate positive role in dealing with crime? Above all, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman urge his colleagues to provide 16-year-olds with benefit, jobs or at least some stake in the future? At present, they have none.

Mr. Clarke: We have built up the concept of victim support panels; I agree with the hon. Lady about their value. We continually increase the resources that we provide for such panels, and also give financial compensation to crime victims through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Such compensation is now provided on a considerable scale. We are readdressing the quality of service and the promptness of the payments.

We have developed the idea of crime prevention panels, which is 25 years old. Youth crime prevention, however, is a particularly important issue, and we continue to support and build on the necessary measures in every possible way. I do not deny that local authorities can play a very useful role in crime prevention: indeed, such a role is played by authorities up and down the country. However, I dispute the narrow point about whether we should lay a new statutory duty on them. The hon. Member for Sedgefield

seems to cling obsessively to that idea. It is not a great centre of policy, as he suggests; it is a footnote to activities that are taking place throughout the country.

Of course it is important for young people to have a purposeful occupation. That is why all the relevant agencies must be involved—local authorities, the education service, the police and others—and why we take every opportunity to support any measure that provides young people who may risk becoming offenders with the chance of some purposeful activity and outlet for their energies. None of that, however, avoids the need to give the courts the power they require to protect the public against those on whom such measures have no effect—those who desire to commit crime and who need to be punished in a way that the public consider fit.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Many people throughout the country will praise my right hon. and learned Friend for his willingness to admit that we have made mistakes. He has listened to the comments that have been made, and come forward to correct the errors.

May I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to try to find time to implement his announcement about secure training orders in the new amendments? Many people, particularly the police, are most concerned that we cannot deal with those young people aged between 12 and 15 who are consistently out of control, when the court has no power to lock them up or restrain them. If Government policy could move towards achieving that, it would be welcomed by both the police and the general public.

Mr. Clarke: I have announced my intentions, and I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's support. I have considered that specific factor, but I do not think that it would be sensible for me to place before the House authorities possible amendments on that issue, which requires greater development of the proposed legislation than can properly be considered in the House and another place in the time remaining in this parliamentary Session.

I do not think that it would save a great deal of time to seek to legislate now in a hurry, because we still have to develop the concept of such institutions. We must have places to which the hard-core persistent offenders can be sent where we can be sure that the regime is suitable for delinquent school-age boys, and is likely to give them the quality of education and training they require when they are locked up to prevent them from harming themselves and the public.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In the light of the massive changes that the Home Secretary has announced today, where people have been fined £400 or £500 for traffic offences and the cases have not gone to appeal, or where fines have been paid over a period of months or weeks and have not yet been paid in full, will those large fines be reduced and will transitional payments be reduced? Thousands of people feel that they have had a raw deal. If the law is to be changed, the changes should be retrospective.

Will the Home Secretary explain how he can talk about bail in the light of what Asil Nadir did the other week when he flew the coop, some say with the help of the Government as he paid £440,000 to the Tory party—and he who pays the piper, calls the tune?

Mr. Clarke: On the hon. Gentleman's first question, large numbers of people are appealing against the fines imposed on them, and quite large numbers have been successful in getting the fines reduced. The Crown court is able to correct on appeal some of the stranger fines which have been imposed—that process will continue. It is up to the House to change the law in future and give the magistrates courts the full discretion they require. Not all the reported cases of high fines are as outrageous as they are sometimes made to appear, although some are absurd, as I have said.

However, some are a slip—it is not necessary to regard the £100 unit as essential when someone has not filled in the form. For example, in the notorious case of the man who was fined £1,200 for dropping a crisp packet, the fine was reduced to £48 on appeal to the Crown court. The fine might have been lower if someone had asked the man to fill out a form at the magistrates court before the first £1,200 fine was imposed.

There is a process under which people can appeal against sentences which they feel are wrong, and have them put right. Some of those who complain to the newspapers have committed serious offences, and I have read of some cases that made me surprised that those involved were not sent to prison rather than being given a large fine. Parliament approved raising the maximum fine to £5,000—a fine is a proper penalty for people with the means who have committed serious offences.

I do not believe that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is seriously maintaining that the Government supported Asil Nadir's escape. If he is, his accusation is groundless and ridiculous, and there is no shred of evidence to support it. His claim is about as daft as his hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield believing that spies are bugging royal marriages.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that my constituents will be delighted by the proposals that he has announced today, particularly as they have suffered as a result of people who have reoffended while on bail? Will it be made clear in the amendments that it is not only parents who are responsible for their children's behaviour, but county councils such as Lancashire county council, into whose care they have been committed? Does he not deplore the fact that the county council appealed against the damages levelled against it for offences committed and damage caused by the children who had been in its care?

Mr. Clarke: The Act applies to local authorities with children in their care as well as to parents, and I agree with my hon. Friend. Some local authority homes are the principal centres of car crime and burglary in their areas. I have some sympathy for those in charge of the homes, however. Following the Children Act 1989 and the guidance issued under it, a great deal of litigation has ensued in the name of children's advocacy; and it has been extremely confusing to be buffeted between the following competing demands—those living near the homes need to be protected from burglary; at the same time, there are the constant worries about the abuse of children and the use of excessive force.

I welcome the guidance recently issued by my colleague in the Department of Health which made it clear that the staff have the legal power—and, in my opinion, the duty—sometimes to impose restraint on young people in their care who are likely to do harm to themselves or others. I am sure that my hon. Friend is looking at that guidance in

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more detail to ensure that we eventually arrive at a commonsense balance that protects children from abuse by those in charge of them and also protects neighbours and local people from crimes committed by children who are completely out of control and who cannot be restrained when the police return them to the children's home from which they have come.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am always keen, as the House knows, to call as many hon. Members as possible, but the House makes that extremely difficult for me when Members ask long questions and make long comments. It is equally difficult when Ministers give very long answers. I hope that what I have said has been taken to heart by all concerned.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I welcome the Minister's intention to get rid of the unifying system which, in practice, has so often worked out unfairly. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell magistrates what they are to do in the meantime? Has he not advised magistrates to use their discretion? The Justices' Clerks Society has advised magistrates that, in its view, to do so would be unlawful. So what are magistrates to do until the system is changed?

Mr. Clarke: The Magistrates Association recently put out advice to its members shortly after it had held a meeting with me. I am glad to say that it was a productive meeting. We entirely agreed on what we wanted to restore to the courts. I believe that the guidance that the association put out thereafter was helpful and accurate.

I have not heard whether the Justices' Clerks Society is maintaining its opposition, but I think that it will find when it reads the guidance carefully that it is consistent with the Act.

One trouble is that practice has varied so widely from court to court. Sometimes courts have appeared to be acting in the belief that they have scarcely any discretion in the size of the unit or how they apply the system. A proper examination of the Act, even before we change it, will show that it does give magistrates courts much wider discretion than some of them have been led to believe in the early stages.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): As my right hon. and learned Friend has said that he will consider other improvements while he is examining these questions, may I ask him to recognise that what worries many of us more than anything is the appalling slowness of the machinery of justice? While it may be necessary to consult the Lord Chancellor, can he give us an undertaking that he will look into that speedily; and that if more resources are required, in the name of British justice they must be provided?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. Incidentally, I was probably less than fair to the hon. Member for Sedgefield for not referring to what he said about how the courts are administered. I have considerable sympathy with his remarks.

The process of criminal litigation—of investigation and processing—now takes much longer than it did 10 or 20 years ago. That is partly inescapable, because of all the additional safeguards introduced to protect yet further the rights of the accused and to guard against the problems of unfair convictions. I am not satisfied, however, that the process is conducted as expeditiously as it could be. I am not satisfied that it imposes the minimum office-bound duties on police officers.

There are too many court adjournments, a problem with which my right hon. and noble Friend is dealing. There are also many other aspects of the administration of criminal justice to which we should turn our minds. Some of them are far beyond my control—for instance, the average length of a criminal trial is almost invariably longer than it was 20 years ago, with no noticeably dramatic improvement in the quality of justice.

I accept that we should not look at the subject in a piecemeal fashion. The criminal justice system faces unprecedented burdens and demands today, but we must ensure that it responds expeditiously while remaining just in its conclusions.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Resulting from the Home Secretary's initial response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the comments that the Home Secretary made on television yesterday—that in all probability private conversations between the Prince and Princess of Wales had been bugged—would the Home Secretary confirm that if such bugging took place it was an illegal act, and that a proper police inquiry and investigation should take place?

Mr. Clarke: I did not say that bugging had taken place. Among the many absurdities appearing in today's press is a misuse of what I said. I was being pressed, ad nauseam, by a lot of journalists—some from newspapers trying to justify yet more pages of royal gossip—about the marvellous bugging that they were so interested in. As they went on, I am afraid that I treated with derision the suggestion that they had the slightest evidence that the bugging had anything to do with the security services. I was told that they had all the information, so I said, "Well, it appears that someone's bugging the royal family."

I have no more knowledge than the hon. Gentleman of whether the stuff is authentic. Having seen some of the people who were parading around yesterday, arguing about who would get money out of it, I am not sure that I am satisfied that any of it is authentic. It is absolutely absurd for the House to be taking up such nonsense at the behest of tabloid newspapers, when the rest of us are discussing serious matters of criminal justice and the powers of the courts.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My right hon. and learned Friend's statement will strike the people of my constituency—who have been writing to me in their hundreds—as according with the grain of common sense, which is exactly what they would expect from a Conservative Administration. They will also have noted the complete lack of support that the statement received from the Liberal Benches.

When my right hon. and learned Friend considers other measures in the same way, will he please consider the workings of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984? As a practising solicitor, may I inform him that any solicitor would tell him that the Act is wide open for exploitation in the interests of criminals? The problem with the operation of the Act is that the balance between

the rights of the criminal and those of society has swung so far that the legislation is actively exploited in the interests of the criminal fraternity.

Mr. Clarke: I agree that common sense is one of the better qualities that can be brought to politics of all kinds. I am sorry that its application has finally sent the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), rushing away to the refuge that I recommended to him. He has gone to confer with his colleagues.

On the second question, the introduction of taped interviews and so forth seems a valuable advance in criminal investigations, and I would not willingly sweep away the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. However, we are waiting for the royal commission, which must deal with the right balance between the demands of justice, the proper requirements of the public interest, and proper and sensible safeguards for the rights of the accused.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Does the Home Secretary agree that the allegations about the security service bugging the royal family seek only to undermine confidence in the service? Does he therefore think that it would be a good idea for the Government to approve the recommendation of the Select Committee on Home Affairs that there should be parliamentary scrutiny of MI5?

Mr. Clarke: The House should not dance that sort of tune to the events of the past few days. We should devote the time of the House, and the efforts of those whom the Government ask to carry out inquiries, to serious matters, where there is some sort of evidence to be investigated. No serious person has come up with any evidence from which one could begin to investigate the rather daft allegation that MI5 is bugging the royal family—[HON. MEMBERS: "There is."]. A mere suggestion in a favourite newspaper —it may not be your favourite, Madam Speaker—is not grounds for political debate or public inquiry.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): My right hon. and learned Friend's proposals will be widely welcomed on Teesside, which unfortunately is the second worst area for car theft. I am told by local police that about 150 young people are perpetrating about 90 per cent. of the crimes. If the courts take all their previous offences—which are legion—into account as a result of today's proposals, will that mean that we will have to put more young people in secure accommodation? If so, is he satisfied that the 17 or 18 places that he has announced for the region will be sufficient? If they are not, will he provide more?

Mr. Clarke: There are strong feelings in all parts of the north-east, and that includes my hon. Friend's constituency, about persistent car theft by a handful of young people. The changes that I am proposing will mean that, when dealing with an offender of any age, the court will be entitled to look at all the offences that he has committed and for which he is before the court, and not just at the most serious and one associated with it. The court will be empowered to have regard to what has happened previously when other types of sentence have been tried. There may well be an even bigger demand for secure accommodation than has already grown up under some of the better provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

There is nothing to stop local authorities providing secure accommodation now, so long as they comply with the requirements of the Children Act 1989. The policies of both the social services and local authorities have led largely to the dramatic decline of secure accommodation across the country, and many local authorities are still unwilling to extend any secure accommodation.

The Government make money available for small numbers of additional places, as my hon. Friend said, but we need to study the proposals made earlier this year about the secure training order and also look for other providers of secure accommodation apart from the social services departments if we are to meet the level of need in the north-east of England.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Why does not the Home Secretary take more seriously the allegations against the security service, bearing in mind the fact that previous allegations about the security service that were denied turned out to be true? Why does he not bear in mind that the feeling of many hon. Members, which I raised at the last Home Office Question Time, is that the Security Service should be fully accountable to Parliament, as in other western democracies? What is so wrong with that, and why does he dismiss it? The Opposition require no lectures on crime from the Government, bearing in mind what has happened in the past 14 years.

Mr. Clarke: The Security Service is subject to my supervision as Home Secretary, as it has been with succeeding Home Secretaries. It is also subject to supervision of the commissioner, Lord Justice Stuart Smith. The Master of the Rolls is also empowered to supervise the security services and has reported that he is quite satisfied—I do not use his exact words—that the Security Service has not been involved in those matters. So a High Court judge, who is the commissioner of the Interception of Communications Act 1985, can find no evidence of such involvement.

Some people are obsessive about anything to do with both the security services and with the royal family. I said yesterday, and I am sorry to repeat it, that if the hon. Gentleman asserted to me that the moon was made of green cheese—which he might—I would investigate it if he could produce anyone who had even seen that the moon was made of green cheese or had a crumb of cheese from the surface. However, the mere assertion in whatever newspaper the hon. Gentleman has read that MI5 is involved is not a basis for setting aside all the statutory controls that the House has agreed or for pandering to newspapers and to people trying to make a quick buck from nasty books.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. and learned Friend's statement will, I am sure, help magistrates and courts to give priority in sentencing to the victims and not to the criminals. Therefore, will he confirm that it is not his intention in any way to interfere with those parts of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 that are working extremely well? They include stronger parental responsibility, tougher sentences for those who commit violent and sexual crimes, reform of parole and tougher community sentences.

Mr. Clarke: Those provisions are indeed all working well. They are quite essential, and I think that we have now sorted out the way in which those provisions are working and put them in line with what I believe the House

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intended. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 will be seen as yet another improvement to the criminal justice system, strengthening the hands of the police and the courts.

Business of the House

4.13 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 MAY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Motion relating to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 18 MAY—Motion for the spring Adjournment.

Remaining stages of the Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 19 MAY—Opposition day, 12th allotted day. Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate described as "Automated Credit Transfer and the Threat to Sub-post Offices", followed by a debate described as "The Destruction of Britain's Defence Industrial Base". Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 20 MAY—European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Third Reading.

FRIDAY 21 MAY—Debate on Government support for exporters, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 24 MAY—Progress on the remaining stages of the Railways Bill.

The House will also wish to know that, on Wednesday 19 May, at 10.30 am, European Standing Committee A will meet to consider EC documents relating to the slaughter of animals, and European Standing Committee B to consider documents on the protection of young people at work.

[Wednesday 19 May:
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Documents:
9880/91, 10306/92 } *Slaughter of animals*
Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee:
HC 24-x (1991-92), HC 79-xxiii (1992-93), HC 79-xvi (1992-93), HC 79-xxviii (1992-93), HC 79-xix (1992-93),

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Documents:
5378/92, 4690/93 } *Protection of young people at work*
Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee:
HC 79-iii (1992-93), HC 79-xxvi (1992-93), HC 79-xxiv (1992-93), HC 79-xxviii (1992-93.]

Lastly, I hope that it will be for the convenience of the House to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the spring Adjournement on Thursday 27 May until Monday 7 June. In case anyone has forgotten what was announced provisionally, I point out that that means one day's extra holiday.

Mrs. Beckett: I feel sure that the House will wish to thank the Leader of the House for his statement. I had not forgotten what was originally announced, but it is useful to be reminded. Am I right in assuming that there will be no parliamentary questions on the Thursday on which the House rises for the Whitsun recess?

On a number of recent business question days the Leader of the House has been good enough to say that he is trying to keep up a record of accepting one of our proposals a week, so may I offer him this week two long-standing options from which to choose? First, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, we are seeking a debate in Government time on two Scottish issues, one of which is the important issue of water privatisation in Scotland, on which yet again fresh conflicting statements seem to be coming from the Scottish Office and elsewhere. As for the second Scottish issue, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have sought a debate in Government time on the White Paper on what the Government call the stocktaking exercise concerning powers in Scotland.

My second range of options involves defence. Despite the fact that we are devoting half of our Supply day to defence, we are aware, as we feel the Government should be, that it is now two years since we debated the defence estimates. The Leader of the House will be aware that such a form of debate offers an opportunity for wide-ranging discussion, and I am sure he knows that it has been suggested that the Government have avoided scheduling a debate for such a long time because they feel some embarrassment at the criticisms that they may face, perhaps even from their own party. However, I know that the Leader of the House takes the view that it is not up to the Government to run away from parliamentary scrutiny of difficult issues and that, indeed, they should ensure that the opportunity is offered. Especially in the light of what has happened to Swan Hunter today as a result of some defence decisions, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will consider finding time for a debate.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends consider keeping the House informed by means of updating statements on the position in Bosnia?

Mr. Newton: I thank the right hon. Lady for the generally constructive spirit in which she again seems to approach her task, and for her kind comments about the constructive spirit in which she, rightly, thinks that I am approaching my task.

I shall take the right hon. Lady's questions in reverse order. I can certainly give her a general assurance that if it seemed right that a further statement should be made about significant developments concerning Bosnia, I should of course seek to arrange that.

I can assure the right hon. Lady that there is no question of the Government's seeking to avoid embarrassment on the defence estimates. The difficulty is that of fitting in the debate, but I shall certainly seek to do so, and we can continue to discuss the matter through the usual channels. The right hon. Lady's question was perhaps a little unkind in view of the fact that several days have been made available for discussing defence matters over the past month or two. If the anxiety was about embarrassment, I do not think that we would have scheduled those as we did.

The debates that the right hon. Lady seeks on Scottish matters, too, should be further discussed through the usual channels, although in the case of water privatisation it would seem to me to be more sensible for a debate to take place when the Government have reached and announced conclusions.

In response to the right hon. Lady's specific first question, I can confirm that it is not proposed to take questions on Thursday 27 May.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Has my right hon. Friend seen early-day motion 1877 on fairer trade with the third world?

[That this House recognises that fair trade is as important as aid in tackling Third World poverty; notes that the Multi-Fibre Arrangement, which directly discriminates against poor countries' clothing and textile exports, denies poor people vital jobs; further notes that the EC has already agreed to start lifting quotas on clothing and textiles from East and Central Europe despite the failure to conclude a GATT agreement, while restrictions against the world's poorest countries have been extended once again; believes that the British Government, through its participation in the EC, the GATT negotiations and the G7 Summit in Tokyo this July, is well placed to take a lead in lifting trade barriers which discriminates against poor countries; and therefore urges Her Majesty's Government to press the EC to start the 10 year phase out of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement, bringing out the poorest countries first and fastest.]

Does he agree with me that, although it is entirely right that the House should be concerned about the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, many millions of our fellow human beings throughout the world are suffering poverty, malnutrition and starvation as a result, in large part, of the unfair trading patterns in the world? Will he find time for an early debate in the House on this matter?

Mr. Newton: While I cannot promise my hon. Friend the early debate that he wants, although I will certainly bear in mind his request, I can most certainly join with him in the general proposition that an open multilateral trading system is of great importance to what is called the third world. Indeed, it is for that very reason, among others, that we as a Government, and I think the whole House, place so much importance on a satisfactory conclusion to the GATT round.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we have a statement this week, or at the latest next week, on water privatisation which in England and Wales has led to about 50,000 homes being disconnected and 10,000 cases of dysentery? In view of the recent reports about a possible Government U-turn on Scottish water privatisation, may we have a clear and unequivocal statement at the earliest opportunity that Scottish water will remain in full public ownership, otherwise water privatisation will do for this Government what Watergate did for Nixon?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said, partly explicitly and partly by implication, to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). All the options set out in the consultation paper called "Investing for Our Future" are being considered, and the appropriate time for debate, in my view, is when conclusions have been reached.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend find just a short slot to enable hon. Members to pay a tribute to our late hon. Friend Robert Adley? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.] He was my neighbour in the House and my near neighbour, and I frequently had the honour and pleasure of driving him to and from the

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House, particularly on days when he was far from well. He was one of the great characters of the House, a man of great courage, strength and determination. His wife Jane has been through it these past few weeks. I am sure that we would all like to send love to her and expressions of support to her family.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that you agree, Madam Speaker, that the response from both sides of the House to my hon. Friend's remarks shows that he is exactly right, and I feel that you too will wish to be associated with them. I certainly wish to be. I had a huge regard for Robert, and I believe that he will be missed on both sides of the House.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that, if sufficient members of the public in Denmark go along with the view of Her Majesty's Government that the Edinburgh decision makes no change whatsoever in their citizenship or national obligations, there may be need for a statement adjusting the business for a week today? Will he undertake that, if there is no acceptance of the question that is being posed to the Danes, that business will be changed?

Mr. Newton: I certainly do not anticipate that need, but obviously Her Majesty's Government always consider changes in circumstances as may be appropriate.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): My right hon. Friend is no doubt aware of the great concern felt by several hon. Members at the delay in the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill. There is a lot of interest among my constituents in Chesham and Amersham and also by the corporation in London, and increasing concern about the delay. I hope that, as the consultants' reports are with Ministers, my right hon. Friend will give an undertaking that the Bill will be brought before the House very soon.

Mr. Newton: I am certain that my hon. Friend is aware of some observations that I made on that matter last week. As she rightly says, the consultants' report has been received and my right hon. Friends are considering its conclusions. I am afraid that I cannot today, much as I would wish to have the chance to hear her, go beyond what I said last week.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the horrors of Bosnia continue unabated, may I press the Leader of the House to press the Prime Minister, as opposed to other Ministers, to make a statement early next week about what action the Government and the international community will take to end all aggression in Bosnia, to secure an effective ceasefire and to defend the so-called United Nations-protected areas?

Mr. Newton: It was within my hearing and, no doubt, the hon. Gentleman's that my right hon. Friend made some further observations—albeit briefly of the sort that are possible in Prime Minister's questions—only a few minutes ago. I should have thought that my right hon. Friend, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and others had made it amply clear over many weeks that they are concerned to do everything that they practicably, possibly and sensibly can to achieve the objectives that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Would it be possible for my right hon. Friend, in the interests of open government, either to arrange a debate or to publish the arrangements by which various Departments bid for time and legislation in the Queen's Speech? There appears to be an ethos, supported throughout the House, that careers are judged on the quantity of legislation that is pressed through the House. If I judge the mood of the country correctly, there is a feeling that there should be a lighter regime altogether.

Mr. Newton: Although that issue is not, as it were, constitutionally tied to my present capacity, my hon. Friend's question is directed to the right quarter as it is a matter of public knowledge that I am Chairman of the Committee, whose initials are FLG, that examines those matters. I hope that when the proposals finally see the light of day my hon. Friend will feel that we have had some regard to his strictures. On the other hand, one has only to be present in this House week by week to know of the number of vigorous demands for legislation in particular that come even from those who are against legislation in general.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is it not time that we had a debate about the serious crises that are building up in the former communist states? Has the Leader of the House seen the statement by Mr. Dashiyn Byambashurian, who resigned from the Great Hural and from his position as Prime Minister of Mongolia because he feared that the country was returning to communism? The crises in that country—and in many others—of finance, of shortage of fuel and of famine are so serious that the population are moving away from their centrally-heated homes and going back to live in medieval yurts which were used thousands of years ago. Is it not true that Britain, by promoting well-intentioned reforms in the former communist countries, is in grave danger of re-creating the tyrannies that they are designed to destroy?

Mr. Newton: All of us, I am sure, are concerned about many of the stories that we read about some of the countries that have been undergoing political and economic change. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that we shall have a debate on that matter, and certainly not next week.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): On next Wednesday's business on sub-post offices, is my right hon. Friend aware that wild, false rumours are running riot about possible wholesale closures of sub-post offices and the interruption of benefits and pensions? Would my right hon. Friend put on his former social security hat to ensure that the Government have an immediate advertising campaign in newspapers and on television to put the record straight and to state that sub-post offices will remain open and that pensions will still be paid——

Madam Speaker: Order. It is a very good try, but the hon. Gentleman is really asking a substantive question on that matter, which is not now the responsibility or the duty of the Leader of the House. If he asks a question about next week's business, that is another matter.

Mr. Madel: I thought that what I said might help next week's business in relation to Wednesday——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking an advertising campaign. What he should be seeking is a statement in next week's business. Is that possible?

Mr. Newton: I will draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to my hon. Friend's request for him to make a particular point about the matter in the speech that he may have the opportunity to make next week. Apart from that, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to what I thought were the clear-cut remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister an hour or so ago.

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): Can the Leader of the House reveal when the Bill on the security services and Government Communications Headquarters will be published? Will he find time for an early debate on the scrutiny of those services because many of the talented people who work in them feel aggrieved that they are unable to answer the allegations contained in newspapers this week?

Mr. Newton: I note the point that the hon. Gentleman makes in the latter part of his question, but I cannot promise an early debate on that nor, for reasons that I am sure he will understand—not least because the Government's proposed programme of legislation for the next Session is currently under discussion—can I give him a precise date for the publication of a particular Bill.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Further to his answer to our hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), will my right hon. Friend convey to his ministerial colleagues the frustration and resentment of my constituents in Aylesbury and many thousands of other people in Buckinghamshire that the crossrail project is subject to so much delay and uncertainty? Will he give Ministers an early opportunity to say that this project has their approval and that they will press ahead with the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill?

Mr. Newton: I note genuinely that this is the third time that one of my hon. Friends has raised this matter in the course of a fortnight. I am sure that it will also have been noted by my right hon. Friends who, I think rightly, wish to have a proper opportunity to consider the consultants' report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be here to answer questions on Monday 24 May.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Leader of the House mentioned the FLG Committee. He will be aware, therefore, of correspondence between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster regarding the privatisation proposals for 8,000 jobs in the Scottish Office and a potential threat to up to 50,000 jobs. The letter shows that several Cabinet Ministers are acting in concert to avoid public scrutiny of legislation which they would need for specific functions regarding privatisation and that, instead, they intend to produce an omnibus Bill in the Queen's Speech in October.

Given that what we are witnessing by these covert actions is the possible loss of hundreds of thousands of civil service jobs and the demise of the United Kingdom civil service as we know it, will the Leader of the House consult his colleagues and ensure that there is an urgent and extensive debate on this issue next week?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake that there will be an urgent and extensive debate on this matter next week, but I take note of the hon. Gentleman's question and will bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the successful introduction of the council tax? Is he aware that in my constituency half the people who have telephoned the council are asking why their bills are so low and that the only serious complaint has come from elderly single people living in large houses who, although they face a serious problem, are perhaps not quite aware how much they would suffer if the Opposition's policy were introduced?

May we also discuss the preposterous claim by the Opposition, repeated in two successive party political broadcasts, that the council tax is £14 lower in Labour councils than in Conservative councils? Is not the truth that it is a statistical fiddle and that, if like is compared with like, that is to say, properties of the same value, the true position is that the tax is £107 lower in Conservative councils?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, it is clear that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who speaks for the Opposition on these matters, has been forced to acknowledge on a number of occasions that the comparisons that he has made are completely bogus, for exactly the reason that my hon. Friend has given.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): That is not true.

Mr. Newton: I have certainly not listened to everything that he has said, but I have read a good deal of it and that is the conclusion that I draw.

As to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, it is a considerable achievement of my right hon. and hon. Friends and also of local authorities throughout the country that the council tax has been introduced as smoothly as it has been.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 1930 concerning May day?

[That this House appreciates the excellent weather that allowed the British people to celebrate and enjoy May Day on Monday 3rd May; and regrets the mean-spirited attempt by this Government to abolish this holiday, which is both a traditional British festival, and also celebrates the international solidarity of workers; and further deplores attampts to move the holiday into the cold, damp depths of autumn.]

Conservative Members have already commented on the effect that the abolition of the May day holiday could have on the hotel and leisure industry. Will the right hon. Gentleman prevail upon his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to make a statement next week on the future of May day, and perhaps persuade her to take a positive attitude rather than her normal small-minded, petty, spiteful one of any institution associated with working people?

Mr. Newton: Having worked in a ministerial capacity for quite some time with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, when we were both in a previous incarnation, I did not recognise her from the descriptions and adjectives that the hon. Gentleman applied to her. An announcement on the question of May day will be made in due course.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate soon on the comments made earlier today in

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

Baghdad by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) to the effect that he is not there to help in the release of the two British detainees? Is it not very worrying that Iraq is being seriously misled by the two unguided missiles that have been sent there?

Mr. Newton: I hope that my hon. Friend will understand why I hesitate before commenting on a statement reported from Baghdad which I have not had an opportunity to study. Certainly all of us would wish to see an effective effort made to resolve the problem that underlies my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): May we debate again next week the issue of the enforcement of the days-at-sea restrictions on the fishing industry? Does the Leader of the House accept that one hour and 11 minutes on Tuesday night was neither the time nor the place in the agenda to deal with an issue as important as the days-at-sea restrictions? Does not the Leader of the House understand that the fishing representatives who attended the debate felt slighted by the truncated way in which the House dealt with an issue which affects the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen and their families in coastal communities around Britain?

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Gentleman's remarks. There has been substantial debate on this matter in relation to the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992, which underlay the orders debated earlier this week. The fact is that those orders were debated in the normal way for negative orders. I think that that was proper. I noticed that the hon. Gentleman managed to make substantial remarks in the course of the debate.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): As the Prime Minister's answer about sub-post offices was substandard, is not it as well that we will have an Opposition debate on this subject next week? Why could we not have a debate in Government time as it is the Government's responsibility?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister having said what he said, I cannot quite understand the basis on which the hon. Gentleman makes that request. It is open to the Opposition to choose what they want to debate, and they have chosen that subject.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): May I endorse the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) for a debate on Scottish water, preferably prior to conclusions being reached?

May I push the Leader of the House on the Crossrail Bill and point out that if the Bill does not have a Second Reading in Government time very soon it will disappear? If the Government wish to kill the Bill, they should have the guts to do so; they should not allow it to go by default by not giving time for it to be debated. Many firms throughout the country will be given an economic kick-start if this and other major infrastructure projects are given the go-ahead.

Mr. Newton: I note that I now have a fourth Opposition Member to add to the growing list of Members pressing me on that matter. Nevertheless, I cannot be pushed, to use the hon. Gentleman's own word, any further this afternoon.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Given that environmental sustainability must henceforth be a fundamental principle in all economic policy, and given that Britain is a signatory to the Rio convention and committed to a sustainable development plan for Britain, will the Leader of the House ensure that we have a debate on this subject—which will be of far-reaching importance for economic policies—preferably before July, when I believe that the draft version of the plan will be published?

Mr. Newton: I can do no more, with the greatest good will, than note the hon. Gentleman's request. The Government acknowledge that environmental issues are of considerable importance, even though they can generate a lot of controversy. I will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): Will the Leader of the House add another name to the list of those calling for an early Second Reading debate on the Crossrail Bill? Is he aware that the Government's central London rail study identified crossrail as the most beneficial transport infrastructure project for London and that the private and public sectors are eager to push ahead with the scheme?

Mr. Newton: I will add the hon. Gentleman's name to the growing list. I am less sure about his hon. Friend from Wales, who I thought might want the crossrail across Cardiff bay.

Job Losses

4.41 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It concerns the frustration that Welsh hon. Members feel about the constant repetition of the example of Shotton and the loss of jobs in the steelworks there 10 years ago, together with inaccurate employment figures that are given for Shotton. At first, the Secretary of State for Wales——

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be obliged if the hon. Member would come to the point of order for me and not argue his case.

Mr. Morgan: The frustration we feel is that parliamentary convention prevents us from saying that a lie has been perpetrated or that the House has been misled. The problem is that the same theme is being used by the Secretary of State for Wales. He first used it during the coal industry debate, when he said that the Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields did not have anything to worry about——

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member please come to the point of order for me?

Mr. Morgan: I am concerned about the means available to Back Benchers to correct a totally incorrect impression that has been given. When jobs are lost in the shipbuilding industry in east Newcastle it is said, as the Prime Minister said today, that more jobs now exist in Shotton than existed when the steelworks were closed——

Madam Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Morgan: In fact, the number of jobs there now is only 45 per cent. of——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is a wily parliamentarian and I know full well that, in raising his point of order with me, he has his tongue in his cheek. I am not prepared to give him advice about procedure across the Floor of the House. He knows full well how to proceed in the matter. If he has a problem, he knows that I am always willing to have a chat with him in my office. My door is always open—most of the time, anyway.

Orders of the Day

Non-Domestic Rating (No. 2) Bill

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment. Order for Third Reading read.

4.43 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am grateful to hon. Members for making such rapid progress in Committee with what is an excellent Bill. I am grateful to the Opposition parties, who have appreciated that the relief offered by the measure is greatly sought after by businesses throughout the country and will be welcomed by them.

As we discovered on Second Reading, the Bill offers a further freeze on rate bills for 1993-94 in real terms. It means that businesses are spared increases of 20 per cent. in real terms where they have a new rateable value of £15,000 or more in London or £10,000 or more elsewhere. Businesses with values below those thresholds are spared 15 per cent. increases.

It brings welcome relief to about 470,000 properties in England to the tune of £340 million in 1993-94 and £220 million in 1994-95, on top of the £1,250 million package that was announced and passed through both Houses last year.

The main beneficiaries will be businesses that have borne the brunt of increases following the 1990 revaluation, with the introduction of the unified business rate. It will include many shops and offices in towns and cities throughout the country, but especially in London and the south-east, where the valuation increases were largest in the valuation based on 1988 values, which turned out to be a high level in the market place. Those businesses can also look forward to the benefits of the new valuation orders on values in 1993, which will come into practice two years later, with parliamentary consent.

The costs of the changes and benefits to business will be met in full out of taxation by the Government making additions to the non-domestic rating pool. Businesses will not experience a change in liability to pay until the commencement date, which we would like to be three weeks after Royal Assent, so giving authorities time to adjust their bills. That is an important reason why I welcome the assistance of the House in making rapid progress with the measure, because it means that businesses are that much nearer to getting the relief that they seek.

The change in liability will have retrospective effect to 1 April, but in the meantime businesses should carry on paying the bills that they have been sent, until the House has completed all stages of the measure and the legislation is brought into effect.

The businesses, as I said, are particularly concentrated in London and the south-east, but there is welcome relief for businesses right across the country which were experiencing quite sharp increases in their valuations as a result of the latest valuation for business premises.

Of the 502,000 properties that will benefit from the measures, about 84,000 are in inner London, 44,000 in outer London, 128,000 in the rest of the south-east, 70,000

[Mr. John Redwood]

in the south-west, 30,000 in the eastern area, 31,000 in the east midlands, 25,000 in the west midlands, 39,000 in Yorkshire and Humberside, 35,000 in the north-west and 14,000 in the north of the country.

As the House can see, the measure has something for businesses all over the country which suffered from the revaluation and will be welcome to them as a result. I have pleasure in commending the Bill to the House and I again express my gratitude for its rapid passage.

4.47 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I am pleased to say that Opposition Members are continuing to support the Bill. Much was said on Second Reading by my hon. Friends about the need for the measure because of the way in which problems in the economy had made matters more difficult for businesses, particularly small businesses and especially in the south of the country, because they were faced with the largest increases in the business rate.

The need to refer to that on Second Reading was even more evident following visits I paid to areas in the south in recent weeks. I visited places such as Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, Ipswich, Suffolk, Hampshire and Weston-super-Mare. Unfortunately, I did not visit Buckinghamshire. Perhaps I should have done so. The difficulties faced by small businesses became more obvious to me and it was clear that they needed relief from the increases in business rates. The voters in those areas expressed that view firmly last week in the county council elections, where the Conservatives felt the impact in the most damaging way.

On Second Reading we had a thorough exchange of views about the need for the Bill, its content and some of the reservations that hon. Members on both sides had about it.

On Second Reading the House noted that the transitional arrangements for the business rate has applied for two years—for 1990-91 and 1991-92—and that during that period it had been recognised that a further transitional period would be needed to provide additional relief for businesses that had suffered most from the increase in the business rate, which occurred at the same time as the recession. Last year, therefore, the Opposition supported the further transitional arrangements that were made for 1992-93.

The House will have noted that the Opposition supported the transitional arrangements both on Second Reading and in Committee and that we are supporting them again on Third Reading. These arrangements are needed because of the depth and length of the recession. Even if there should be an economic recovery in the next 12 months, further legislation will probably be needed next year and the year after.

A number of worries were voiced on Second Reading and I shall voice them again today. We are worried that the Government will renege on any commitment to maintain, in real terms, expenditure on local authority services that they have identified may be needed in future. The worry is that the Government will be unable to provide local authorities with the resources that they currently receive, which many people believe are already inadequate. As business rate revenue next year is likely to fall, less money will be available to local authorities, which will lead to difficulties over local authority expenditure.

The Government are struggling to maintain the rate poundage at its present level, partly because of the effects of the recession and the transitional arrangements. Small businesses are worried that the Government may be tempted to renege on the 1988 regulations which kept the increase in rate poundage in line with the rate of inflation.

The transitional arrangements will eventually, of course, come to an end. If they were to come to a sudden end, the consequences for a number of businesses which now enjoy the benefit of this relief could be extremely serious. That worry is not addressed by the Bill. Therefore, the small business community is looking for an assurance that there will be no sudden end to the transitional relief scheme.

People are also becoming increasingly worried about the lack of local democracy. Local people are no longer able to make decisions that affect them; they are unable to determine the kind of services that they want for their community and the way in which those services should be financed. It is not only those who were campaigning in the local elections, or Opposition Members, who say that. Many business leaders are saying it, too, as well as the Institute of Directors and the chambers of commerce. They believe that the determination of the business rate should be left to local communities.

The Government should examine the possibility of giving that responsibility back to local communities. I can give the people of this country a commitment: that the Opposition, when in government, will address that important issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman says anything else, I remind him that Third Reading speeches are supposed to be about the contents of the Bill. He is going rather wider than the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not intend to steer myself away from the Bill's contents.

The business community believes that the effects of the Bill will be beneficial. I predict, though, that similar legislation will be needed next year. Additional legislation will also be needed to deal with the revaluation of business properties—effective from 1995, but based on rental values this year. Revaluation will give rise to a number of anomalies with which the House will have to deal at some future date.

Notwithstanding our reservations, some of which I have intentionally expressed and others to which I referred inadvertently, we are happy to give the Bill a Third Reading.

4.56 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Unfortunately, I was not here for the Second Reading debate, though I read the report of it in *Hansard*. Nevertheless, I attended diligently throughout the Committee proceedings and enjoyed them enormously.

I support the contents of the Bill, largely because of the effect that it will have on my constituency, which has been hit hard by the recession. It is an area that has traditionally enjoyed high employment and a high level of business

expansion. The shock of the recession had a disproportionate effect on businesses in my community. That is why the Bill is so welcome. Businesses in my constituency are committed to being among the first to come out of the recession.

Business needs a degree of certainty for its expansion plans. The Chancellor's announcement and the contents of the Bill will go a long way towards providing local businesses with the confidence to make an extra effort and thus reduce unemployment.

The Bill builds upon the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Its importance is that it limits the rise in business rates to the level of inflation. I moved from an area where rateable values are traditionally low to one where they are traditionally high. I am only too well aware, therefore, of the effects that a move towards full valuation would have on local businesses.

Firms in Brentwood and Ongar need to be encouraged to take on more staff. I am acutely aware of the fact that 3,056 people in my constituency are unemployed. That figure is very small compared with unemployment elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, it is my responsibility, and that of the House, to encourage local businesses to take on more people. The Bill will, I believe, encourage local firms to do precisely that.

I can foresee clearly what would happen if the Bill were not passed. In the past, business decisions were taken bearing in mind the effects of local taxation. The Bill ensures that business decisions can be taken which ignore the question of local taxation when considering the siting of an office or a factory. I recall a great disparity between offices in one part of the country and identical offices in other parts of the country. Under the old system, businesses were squeezed by local councils until—to use Lord Healey's immortal words—the pips squeaked. The system gave rise to unfair competition and unbalanced markets. Local firms were forced to look round the country for areas that had low levels of taxation. The Bill avoids that situation. It encourages business people to stay in their local communities.

Let me cite a classic case. I recall a firm that had a site in Kensington and Chelsea and a site in Sheffield. In one case the poundage was 117p and in the other it was 347p. That sort of situation does not encourage business people to stay in their local communities. I know of business men who literally took factory roofs off to avoid paying rates. That kind of activity does not encourage expansion. The Bill is necessary as it ensures that rate levels can be kept down. I have received from the chambers of commerce in Brentwood and Ongar representations to the effect that they are in favour of freezing the level of taxation.

I have much pleasure in recommending the Bill to the House and hope that hon. Members will feel able to support it.

5·1 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I too welcome the measures, which will provide some help for hard-pressed businesses. I am delighted to hear that 502,000 businesses throughout the country will benefit. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), whose remarks on Second Reading I read with amusement when I was in Cornwall to fulfil some long-standing engagements connected with the county council elections. It is clear from the results of last Thursday's elections that my visit was time well spent.

The only question mark over the Bill relates to whether it does enough. In the corresponding debate last year, the Minister said:

> "I know that the recession has created difficulties for many businesses . . . The Government have therefore decided that their costs this year should not be worsened . . .
>
> We propose a one-year freeze to provide a breathing space."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 1992; Vol. 208, c. 204.]

The fact that the Minister is now providing another year's breathing space shows that perhaps not enough was done last year.

Sadly, last year's green shoots of recovery faded away. The Government misjudged the situation then and the result was fatal for many thousands of businesses. This year there are signs that the number of businesses going under is beginning to decrease. I welcome that trend. Again we are hearing of the famous green shoots. During the election campaign someone told me that they were election green shoots. It is rather odd that these shoots always appear in the spring. I hope that this year's are real and that they will grow strong. Only when that happens shall we be able to get Britain back to work. Only then will hon Members be able to start to argue about where best to invest the new money, instead of scrapping about where cuts should be made.

With regard to recovery, the jury is still out. While I was travelling down to Cornwall two weeks ago I heard the financial director of Tarmac interviewed on the "Today" programme early in the morning. Having been asked whether there were any green shoots, he replied:

> "Yes, but we've seen green shoots every spring for the last four years, and they have all faded away."

On this occasion I am prepared to give the Minister the benefit of the doubt. Good luck to the green shoots and good luck to the many thousands of businesses all over the country which must survive and grow. I must put this question to the Minister: if, in the next few months, there is any sign that the recovery is faltering, will he come back to the House and announce further measures, including further non-domestic rate reductions, to help companies to survive?

5.5 pm

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Members who have contributed to this brief debate.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) suggested that we shall need further legislation next year. I hope not. The signs of recovery are most encouraging. Business reports from around the country imply that output is rising and that there are opportunities for more business activity. That is what we all wish to see. I remind the House that this measure will continue to provide substantial benefits next year. Taking last year's provision and this year's provision together, the figure is about £355 million. We hope that that will be enough to do the job.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North asked about real levels of local authority expenditure and business rate pool compensation. As he is aware, this measure provides for full compensation to the pool for the expense of the concessions made. Details of real levels of local government expenditure for next year will be announced at the normal time and in the normal way. Statements regarding the public expenditure figures that

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we set out last autumn will give the hon. Gentleman some guidance about Government plans. As he will see there, we are not planning savage cuts in local authority expenditure, as he and some of his hon. Friends like to suggest. There is no intention to renege on the essential 1988 promise that, under the new system, business rates would be allowed to rise only at the rate of inflation. That was the kernel of the new scheme. That was the promise given to and widely welcomed by the business community. It remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government, and it is what the legislation says, with the necessary exception of revaluations—revaluations are always the exception—which have been handled through transitional relief and through this measure.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that transitional schemes have been set out for the most recent revaluation—that of 1988, which came into effect in 1990. I have told the House in the past—I renew the commitment—that, as we know the details of the new valuation based on 1993, and as we think about its introduction for 1995, we shall ask ourselves whether there is any need for a new or further scheme of transitional relief in the event of very large changes which we think would be difficult to implement in one go. I cannot say at the moment. I do not know, and I do not suppose that the hon. Gentleman knows, what changes might occur as a result of that revaluation. We will make our judgment at the time and will put the matter to the House in the usual debate.

I do not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you will allow me to wander into the area of local democracy, but I should like to say that the retail prices index pledge is important. I am not quite sure how the hon. Gentleman was marrying his wish to sustain the RPI link, which I entirely support, with his wish to give local councils discretion to fix the level of the rate. What discretion would they be given if the level of the permitted increase were specified in legislation? This is a matter that will need to be clarified in another debate or at another time.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) for his strong support for the measure. He has rightly said that small businesses are crucial in constituencies like his own. Indeed, they are crucial in constituencies up and down the country. It is small businesses above all that will welcome the measure. For a small business man faced with an increase in the valuation of single business premises, the cost increase is very big if the full impact of the change has to be taken. It is very likely that large national businesses with a variety of properties do rather better from the averages, or the swings and roundabouts, of the valuation system.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) criticised me for bringing to the House measures last year and then coming back for a second go in the current year. That is necessary, given the way in which transitional relief and the previous legislation worked. I would have hoped that his party would have welcomed the fact that in his Budget the Chancellor rightly saw that business would appreciate a further year's relief on top of the relief already granted.

Towards the end of his speech the hon. Gentleman was less cynical in his comments on recovery and green shoots. I welcome his desire to see recovery grow and strengthen, as we all do. I believe that the recovery is developing and that the measures will make an important contribution to improving business progress and prosperity over the ensuing year.

Therefore, I hope that we will not need to do the same next year, but I remind the House that the benefits of the legislation will live beyond the current year. That will be more than welcome to the business community.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I regret the need to stand at the Dispatch Box today to introduce a necessary Bill. Were it not for the survival of barbarism in the form of terrorist violence, there would not have been any need for such a Bill. It is a melancholy reflection on life in the latter part of the 20th century that there are still individuals who, in modern democratic societies, being unable to achieve their objectives through the democratic process of the ballot box, are prepared to throw aside the conventions of civilised society and to bomb, maim and kill indiscriminately. One consequence is damage to buildings as well.

The Bill is in response to the spate of terrorist bombings which have occurred recently and which are merely the British facet of an international problem. I was born just after one of the worst wars that the human race has ever suffered, after which we all thought that we would not see such barbarities committed again in Europe in our lifetime. Regrettably, I have grown up against a backdrop of political terrorism in Europe through groupings such as the Baader-Meinhof gang in the 1960s in Germany. On both sides of the House we all deplore and regret that feature of our lives. I am happy that there is a bipartisan or indeed a multipartisan consensus to the extent that we are all united in our desire and, indeed, our determination to prevent such acts of violence from having an impact on our political decisions in so far as those decisions might be thought in any way to involve the bowing of the head or the knee to the achievement of the political objectives of the terrorists who are responsible for so much damage and tragedy.

The Bill is a short enabling measure. I do not propose to speak for very long, but I shall describe the arrangements through which Government reinsurance for acts of terrorism will be provided. I shall also say something about a number of issues which I know concern some hon. Members. A summary of the arrangements was tabled on Tuesday 11 May in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). I hope that that has been for the convenience of the House because, although I say so myself, I doubt that hon. Members will derive much profit simply from reading the text of the Bill. The meat which surrounds the skeleton is the way in which the reinsurance scheme has been constructed. That does not require us to deal with it in statutory form today.

Last November the insurance industry announced that, with effect from 1 January this year, it would cease to renew or to provide new insurance cover on industrial and commercial property which included provision for damage or loss caused by acts of terrorism. That withdrawal of cover was for prudent commercial reasons, following the loss of their own reinsurance protection predominantly from large European reinsurers, against the background of a sharp contraction in reinsurance capacity world wide and worsening claims experience in mainland Great Britain. It is a typical reaction of the international reinsurance market that during its cyclical reductions in capacity it not only increases prices but declines the least attractive business.

That development was understandably of great concern to British industry and commerce. We received many representations from individuals who were concerned at being unable to insure their property, which meant that they would have to assume the full measure of risk against damage from explosions caused by terrorists. In those circumstances, the Government could not stand idly by and we joined enthusiastically in discussions with the insurance industry and with those who at the end of the day have to pay the bills for the insurance that benefits them. We have put together a scheme which we believe will be effective and which will for ever deny terrorists of all kinds the fruits of their satanic endeavours to bring the country and its commerce to a standstill through explosions, wherever they take place.

The Government concluded that it was necessary to ensure the continued availability of insurance cover for loss and damage arising from acts of terrorism. That cover could continue to be available only if the insurers could be reinsured themselves. On 21 December 1992 the President of the Board of Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), announced that the Government would act as reinsurer of last resort to insurers of industrial and commercial property in Great Britain, with effect from 1 January this year. Since then, the arrangements necessary to give effect to the announcement have been developed to an advanced state. My right hon. Friend laid a minute before the House on 14 January explaining the reasons for entering into a contingent liability ahead of specific legislation.

A number of general principles underlie the Government's intervention. The Government seek to avoid disruption to industry and commerce which might be caused by lack of terrorism cover. The arrangements are to deal with the consequences of a market failure, but they are intended to minimise disruption of the insurance and reinsurance markets. The Government's involvement will last as long as is necessary to remedy that failure, but equally the arrangements are temporary and the Government will withdraw as soon as adequate sources of commercial reinsurance are available once more.

It is important to recognise that the arrangements are not a state aid. Over their lifetime, the arrangements are expected to be at nil cost to the taxpayer. The Government seek not to expose the insurers to undue risks which might threaten their solvency. Clearly, that would benefit no one and could cause a much wider collapse than would occur simply as a result of failure to insure or reinsure commercial and industrial property itself. If the solvency of insurance companies generally were adversely affected, the shock waves would go well beyong the centres of cities and would affect the whole country.

The arrangements are to cover the consequences of a market failure, but our aim is to maintain the insurance and reinsurance markets in effective operation and to fund the scheme ultimately from the premiums charged to those who derive the benefit of insurance and reinsurance for industrial and commercial property which is under threat of damage from terrorist explosions and the like.

The arrangements contain a number of necessary restrictions on the behaviour of the policy holder. Where such measures exist, they are the minimum consistent with the protection of the taxpayer who in a sense is the

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

ultimate reinsurer. It is in the nature of commercial insurance that sophisticated policy holders will endeavour to be selective about the risks that they transfer to insurers, but the cardinal principle of insurance is the spreading of risk. In conditions of some market failure, risk needs to be widely spread if the interests of the taxpayer are to be protected.

I should make it clear that this is a reinsurance scheme, not compensation. If insurers do not buy the proper insurance cover, the Government will not entertain claims for compensation from them in the event of loss or damage. Although the Government have intervened, the solution that we have put together is fundamentally a market one.

The structure and operation of the arrangements are described in the summary tabled on 11 May, to which I referred a few moments ago. Briefly, insurers wishing to offer property insurance, including terrorism cover, will become members of a mutual reinsurance company, Pool Reinsurance Company Ltd. That company will reinsure all terrorism risks situated in Great Britain borne by its insurer members and for which an additional insurance premium has been paid by the insured. In turn, the Secretary of State will reinsure Pool Reinsurance Company Ltd.

The company will take an entirely commercial approach to applications for membership. In principle, all insurers operating in the United Kingdom will be eligible for membership, including Lloyds syndicates and overseas insurers. Conversely, membership will not be compulsory if insurers do not wish to join. An important feature for smaller firms is that their basic property damage policy will provide £100,000 of cover for buildings, contents and business interruption automatically and without the need to pay an additional premium. The insured will have the choice of buying extra terrorism cover beyond the £100,000 per section as an addition to their property insurance policy for which an additional premium will be paid.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Can my hon. Friend clarify what he means by membership? He said that membership will not be compulsory but voluntary. Is he referring to membership of the company in a technical sense? Who will be the shareholders, and will they be fixed?

Mr. Hamilton: The shareholders of the company will be those insurance companies that are reinsuring through the company. Consequently, membership of the company—as with any company—will be fluid over time as it will be a company limited by guarantee.

The aim of this scheme is for the Government to stand behind the insurance industry that wishes to provide the service of insurance cover for terrorism risks to ordinary members of the public who would otherwise be without the opportunity to take advantage of that service. I shall say a little more about the structure of the company in a moment.

As I said, the insured will have to pay for extra terrorism cover beyond the £100,000 per section. Consequently, we shall reinforce the market, rather than destroy it. That is why our ultimate aim—if that proves possible—is to withdraw again so that there is a reinsurance market capable of taking up the reins without the need for any Government assistance. Ultimately, we hope that all terrorist groups will draw a conclusion from a quarter of century of failure, in the case of the IRA, to move the British Government an inch towards the realisation of their objectives. I hope that the Bill will receive a warm welcome in such terms that anyone who might seek to change the political system in the United Kingdom by the bomb and the bullet will not derive any superficial advantage.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): The key to the success of the scheme relates to how soon the Government wish to withdraw from it. If the Government want an early withdrawal, higher premiums may have to be paid to get the money back.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend perhaps misunderstands what I am saying. We do not seek to be involved permanently in the scheme, but I must make it absolutely clear that the Government will stand behind insurance companies for as long as is necessary. We shall not in any way be deflected from the achievement of the purposes which lie behind the Bill by considerations of cost. Clearly, the cost to the taxpayer of the collapse of the commercial economic system of the United Kingdom, without having some mechanism of this sort to preserve stability, would be incalculably greater than whatever sums might have to flow from the taxpayer in the short term to iron out the fluctuations in income and expenditure of Pool Reinsurance Company.

Although we have tried to construct a scheme whereby there is a commercial involvement of the companies that provide insurance cover and of the Government—in certain circumstances we intend to charge a premium for the service that we provide—we hope that, ultimately, there will be no cost to the taxpayer and that the cost to the industry and, indeed, the insured will be a small portion of the total outgoings. The spreading of the risk as widely as possible, as we envisage through the scheme, will mean that a large number of individuals who are paying into the scheme will have to pay a sum which, admittedly, will be more than they have paid in the past. In the past, terrorist cover was thrown in with a policy at no extra charge and no one had to consider the matter because we were never subjected to significant risks.

It is inevitable that costs will be greater than they have been because the cost in the past has been zero to the insured. We hope and expect that such costs will be modest and easily absorbed, especially—to follow the points made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities in the previous debate—as the economy is beginning to recover and the gross national product will rise with it. That will tend to more than offset any increased costs from the insurance sector. I do not wish to turn this debate in any way into a cause of controversy, so I will not pursue those dangerous lines of argument any further.

To return to the points that I was making earlier about the nature of the scheme that Pool Reinsurance Company will operate and the membership of the company, the insurer will be required as a condition of membership to remit all additional premiums to the company, which will hold and invest those premiums. The company will be reinsured by the Government, who will charge a premium —payment of which will be deferred until such time as the company has built up a stabilising fund of £1 billion. The

premium charged by the Government as reinsurer will normally be 10 per cent. of premiums received by the company, unless what I might call an experience premium equivalent to the claims paid by the Government is greater. The deferred premiums charged on either basis will bear interest until they are paid.

When there are claims, the insurers will bear the first £100,000 under each section of the basic property policy and recover claims beyond that amount from the company. Such claims will be paid out of the premiums received. If those resources are exhausted, the company will raise a levy on its members of up to an equivalent of 10 per cent. of the premiums that they have remitted. If the levy and any investment income is also fully used, the company will claim on its reinsurance contract with the Government. The scheme is simple and can be broken down into segments of insurance, reinsurance and retrocession of the insurance agreement.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My right hon. Friend and other hon. Members will know of my interest in this matter as a member of the council of Lloyd's and an underwriting member of Lloyd's of London. My right hon. Friend explained that the scheme is simple. He has made it clear that the scheme will not apply to Northern Ireland, where there is a different scheme. Can he explain why it is appropriate that there should be a separate scheme for the United Kingdom other than Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall certainly do that. An interesting fact that I discovered about the situation in Northern Ireland as a result of background work for the Bill is that compensation arrangements have existed there for 300 years to cover the loss and damage caused by what might be called terrorist activity. We did not think it sensible to apply the same kind of scheme in Great Britain, which differs from Northern Ireland in many respects. It is a matter of horses for courses. The Northern Ireland compensation arrangements have worked very well during the current emergency, but we foresee no circumstances in which we would need such a scheme in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The extent to which we shall need to draw on the arrangements laid down in the Bill remains to be seen. We naturally hope that the terrorists will draw the logical inference from our readiness to act and will give up the struggle. I suppose that it is rather too much to expect psychopaths to think in a logical way, but they should be in no doubt that we will not allow the country to grind to a halt as a result of their activities in the city centres or anywhere else.

We shall react accordingly in any circumstances which may arise in the future, but for the time being we think that the scheme for which we now seek statutory authority will be effective in meeting the challenge presented to us in Great Britain. As I have said, we have designed a separate scheme to meet the different circumstances in Northern Ireland, although those circumstances arise from the same cause. Let me add that Northern Ireland will never be detached from the United Kingdom without a democratic vote by the majority there, freely given. The bomb and the bullet will never achieve that objective, certainly so long as the present Government remain in office, and I am sure that I also speak for the Labour party—should it ever be favoured with the opportunity to govern this country again—when I say that this bipartisan policy will be maintained.

If the Pool Reinsurance Company achieves an underwriting surplus in any year, after deducting the Government premium due for that year, it can distribute 10 per cent. of that surplus to its members in proportion to the premiums that they have remitted.

Clause 1(1) of the Bill empowers the Secretary of State to make payments in fulfilment of the obligations into which he has entered under the agreement to provide reinsurance cover. The clause also empowers the Secretary of State to make payments under guarantees that he may give. It is envisaged that he might wish to give guarantees to lenders, to ensure that the Pool Reinsurance Company could make prompt payment of claims from its members. Entering into the agreement and any guarantees would be subject to Treasury approval.

Clause 1(2) requires the agreement with the Pool Reinsurance Company to be laid before the House after the passing of the Bill, and as soon as it is entered into. Clause 1(3) requires Government premiums from the company to be remitted to the Consolidated Fund. Clause 2(1) defines the reinsurance arrangements to which the Act would apply: they involve risks of damage to property in Great Britain arising from acts of terrorism. Clause 2(2) defines the acts of terrorism concerned, and clause 3 provides that the Act does not extend to Northern Ireland —where, as I have explained, separate arrangements operate.

I want now to comment on a number of matters which have aroused concern in some quarters. Buyers of insurance are naturally anxious to minimise costs. The premium increases appear large in some cases as a proportional increase over the premium charged last year. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), however, insurance premiums will still represent a very small proportion of total business costs and will represent good value overall.

Some illustrative examples may be helpful to the House. First, I take the example of a city centre office block insured for £10 million. The extra terrorism premium is typically £8,000 per year, up to a maximum of £12,000. Away from city centres, that would fall to £1,600 per year. By contrast, a typical annual maintenance charge would be £165,000 and the rent on such a block would be up to £2 million a year. In other words, the terrorism premium is equivalent to less than two days' rent.

The logic of that, for those who seek to bring the country to a halt by means of terrorist action, is that although those extra costs are unwelcome and an irritant —at a time of recession any extra cost is unwelcome and could have undesirable effects on employment, disrupt business, and so on—their chances of achieving their objectives in any meaningful way by means of explosions and damage to commercial buildings are so small as to be almost infinitesimal.

Equivalent figures for a £100 million block are a terrorism premium of £50,000, rising possibly to £75,000. On such a block there will typically be a maintenance charge of £1·3 million and an annual rental of up to £19 million. So the extra premiums that I mentioned, even in cases of that kind, are quite modest compared with other costs.

Work has also been undertaken to gauge the point at which increases in insurance premiums would distort

[Mr. Hamilton]

location decisions. It is certainly not the Government's wish to make insurance premiums themselves a cause of businesses moving from one location to another. On the other hand, premiums will also need to follow the normal insurance principle of being related to perceived levels of risk. Premium rates are being reviewed now, and will be reviewed thereafter at least annually. In the present circumstances, the next price movement is almost certain to be upwards, but I would expect the price structure to evolve over time and prices to go down as well as up. Commercial buyers of insurance should bear in mind that —as I believe some already recognise—their premiums were about to rise sharply in any event, following a period in the insurance cycle when many insurers were losing money heavily on commercial lines.

The arrangements envisaged have a number of other advantages. By charging a premium for the reinsurance cover, the Government are both protecting the taxpayer and enabling the business community to carry on as usual despite terrorism. If no premium were charged, the arrangements would be permanent, as no commercial reinsurer could ever compete with reinsurance that was provided free of charge. The arrangements will create headroom which will allow commercial reinsurers to re-enter the market and, over time, allow the Government to withdraw. That is fundamental to our conception of the scheme. By deferring the paying of the premium until a sizeable fund has built up, the price should eventually settle at a lower and more stable level than would be the case if no buffer were ever created.

Furthermore, adapting an insurance solution to what is essentially an insurance problem means that the expertise of the insurance industry can be harnessed in settling claims speedily and fairly both for claimants and for those who bear the costs. If we were to introduce a compensation scheme, there could be greater delays and more inconvenience to those who, following damage and loss, want to get back to business as quickly as possible. In general, the market is likely to be more responsive than Government to spasmodic convulsions of that kind.

A number of groups have come forward seeking relief from the premiums being charged. I know that that worries many hon. Members. Of course, it would be nice to be popular with them by telling the Pool Reinsurance Company to accede to those requests as they arise and to let the taxpayer foot the bill but, as my hon. Friends know, it is no business of the Government to seek to be popular. Consequently, we have designed a scheme which may constitute a hard road, but which we believe in the long-term to be in the best interests of the entire country.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My hon. Friend advances his argument extremely well. There is a cost that should reasonably fall on commerce and business—as my hon. Friend knows, I have advanced that argument forcefully in recent days—but does my hon. Friend agree that it is also crucial that all businesses should take advantage of the pool reipsurance facility and that the premium charged should not be a disincentive for them to do so?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with the second of my hon. Friend's two points. The premium charged should not be a disincentive against taking advantage of the scheme placed before potential insurers. Naturally, I hope that all people who feel themselves to be at risk from such damage or loss will take advantage of the insurance opportunity that exists. It is not the Government's intention to force people to take out insurance. If they choose to assume the risk themselves, that is a commercial decision that they must take.

I shall risk saying that it would certainly be in someone's commercial interests normally to take out such insurance. I am a great believer in insurance, but everyone has to make his own calculations. Clearly, companies expose themselves to significant risk in the event of an explosion. If the premium is modest, it should not prove a disincentive—it would be in people's interests to take advantage of the insurance.

We could make ourselves popular by acceding to the requests that have been made and let the taxpayer foot the bill. The logic of such an approach is that there is such upward pressure on public expenditure for the indefinite future that the same individuals, in their capacity as taxpayers, might find different reasons to place us in an unpopular light at times of greater political sensitivity—for example, when our seats are up for election at the next general election, whenever that may be.

I do not think that there is an easy answer to the problem. Apart from the implications for public expenditure, there is the question of how the insurers can explain special treatment for one group of policy holders to the remainder of their policy holders. There will also be the increased cost of operating a more complex scheme —success for one group is likely to encourage others, which could lead to a further erosion of premium income and the need for more premium increases for those taking advantage of the service. Such narrowness of scope runs counter to the insurance concept of spreading the risk and would also lead to problems of definition and qualification. As Minister with responsibility for deregulation, when designing the scheme I sought to reduce the amount of bureaucratic obfuscation and the cost of administration, and to make the scheme as simple as possible, as widely available as possible and as cheap as possible.

There has been only one amendment to the price tariff since it was introduced—to deal with the problem of blocks of flats. The insurers' original intention was to exclude private policy holders from the scope of their exclusion so that they would continue to receive terrorism cover for no extra charge. Although flat dwellers normally regard themselves as private policy holders, blocks of flats are commonly insured by service companies and property-owning companies, and thus treated as commercial customers. Individual private residents were therefore having an extra terrorism premium passed on to them. After further consideration of the costs and risks, the Pool Reinsurance Company reduced the premiums charged for blocks of flats and the move was announced in a written reply by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 4 March. Blocks of flats with a sum insured value of up to £2·5 millions will be covered by the insurer for no extra premium. Above that level, the premium has been reduced to about one ninth of the rate for industrial and commercial premises in London and one quarter of the rate elsewhere, so no individual policy holder should face a premium increase of more than £10 to £20 for the normal range of property values.

I should like to clear up some confusion about the availability of cover for churches, which are eligible to be covered by the arrangements. It is for the individual church authorities to decide whether to cover specific churches by paying an additional terrorism premium. It so happens that the chief executive of one of the insurers specialising in covering church property is a member of the board of the Pool Reinsurance Company. Therefore, special arrangements were made some time ago to permit another specialist insurer of churches to remit its premiums to the Pool Reinsurance Company.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The Minister is explaining the distinction between the insurance of commercial operations and the insurance of private operations. What would be the position of those taxi drivers who lost their vehicles through terrorist operations at the time of the Bishopsgate bomb? Are they classified as commercial operators and thus covered by the scheme, or as private ones? I believe that, at the time, they were classified as private and thus not covered by insurance. To take the argument one stage further, what about the private citizen whose car is commandeered in that way? Will he be covered by the scheme?

Mr. Hamilton: The Bill seeks to deal with the problem of insurance cover not being available in the market for damage to commercial buildings. It has never been the case that cover for terrorist risks was not available when cars were damaged—as in the case referred to by the hon. Gentleman. It is not the Government's purpose to prevent the market from providing a solution. If it were proved that such cover was not available, we would be prepared to consider representations on the subject. However, I understand that at present such insurance cover is available and that no one has been refused it. As insurance premium rates have been rising for a variety of reasons, which will be known to the hon. Gentleman, larger amounts of money may be involved. However, the insurance business is a competitive one—a large number of companies provide a variety of products and it should be perfectly possible for individuals who feel that they are at risk to obtain insurance protection against that risk.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Minicab drivers can obtain either comprehensive or third party insurance for their cabs. Drivers with third party insurance are unable to claim compensation from the insurance companies in such cases because third party insurance relates to someone other than the insured. Later in the debate I hope to raise cases which have occurred recently in my constituency. Will the Government consider examining such cases, which involve people's livelihoods?

Mr. Hamilton: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that the drivers should buy comprehensive insurance and they would then be covered. It is up to each individual to decide for himself the level of insurance cover that he wants and to bear in mind the risks that he runs by not taking out cover. We all have to take such decisions. I have one car that is insured comprehensively and another car that is covered under third party, fire and theft insurance. I have taken that decision bearing in mind the car's value and whether I would seek to replace it if it were damaged as a result of an accident for which I was responsible. It is up to each individual to determine his requirements.

I hope that I have answered the question posed by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), whose presence today I welcome. Although the Bill relates to Great Britain, the hon. Gentleman's presence turns this into a United Kingdom debate. I always welcome the presence of Northern Ireland Members in debates in the House as it serves as a practical expression of this country's unity. That, in itself, is an act of defiance against the IRA and others who seek to detach the Province from the United Kingdom by their undemocratic methods.

I believe that the Bill and the scheme that we have developed represent a clear and unmistakable signal both to business and to terrorists of all persuasions. To business in London and throughout the country, the Bill is a signal that the Government are determined to ensure that the normal insurance mechanism will continue to work, so that business assets destroyed or damaged for whatever reason can be reconstructed or replaced without delay. To overseas investors in the United Kingdom I say the same. To the terrorists, it is a signal that business and Government together will not permit wanton criminal damage, whatever its cause, to interfere with normal commercial life for a moment longer than is necessary.

I have pleasure in commending the Bill to the House.

5.49 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I shall pick up where the Minister left off. We fully agree that terrorism cannot impose its will on the British people by acts of violence against property or person. The great tragedy of recent disasters has been the loss of life, for which we grieve and which creates widows or orphans, not a political solution. Unfortunately, that message has not penetrated elsewhere; but one message that can penetrate is that the people of the United Kingdom will not bend the knee or bow the head to terrorism in any guise. The problems of the people of Northern Ireland are, like all other problems, subject to a political solution which, as the Minister said, can come only by the ballot box and by majority vote. We are entirely in agreement with the Government on that.

The Bill must be seen in the context of how insurance markets are coming to terms with many of the disasters that struck at the end of the past decade and which affected the so-called London catastrophe market—to which reinsurers refer as the non-proportional excess of loss market. It has suffered a dramatic shrinkage of capacity —a shrinkage to which the President of the Board of Trade referred when he made his original statement on the Government being the reinsurer of last resort.

This dramatic shrinkage has also affected premium rates. The shrinkage resulted from a series of catastrophes which, with our short memories, we may already have forgotten: the Piper Alpha oil rig explosion of July 1988; hurricane Hugo; the Philips Pasadena refinery explosion; and the San Francisco earthquake. They all had an impact on the reinsurance market and showed how we live in and are part of a global market. They also had an effect on the retrocession market, as it came to be called, and they combined with the losses suffered by Lloyd's of London.

Before 1987, an insured loss of about $1 billion occurred only once every few years; now it occurs each year. The reinsurance market reacted to the events which brought about the general shortage of capacity and led to some reinsurers withdrawing from the scheme at the end of last year.

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

I welcome the fact that the Bill is retrospective as far back as 1 January and thus covers the niche left in the market by the withdrawal of those reinsurers. I also echo the Government's hope that, as a result of the mechanisms put in place by the Bill, some confidence will be restored to the reinsurance market. European reinsurers must understand that it is for them to come back into this type of risk, thereby, at first, providing competition for the Government and in the end allowing the Government to withdraw.

I agree with the idea that the Bill is a mechanism designed to help the reinsurance markets of the world, which should be big and confident enough to return to this sector.

On a lighter note, I was struck by the use of the word "retrocessionaire" as a description of the Government's role as a reinsurer of the last resort. I had hoped that hon. Members, having read "The House Magazine"—this week's issue contains an article by me on France—would come flooding into this debate from the bars and corridors of the House. I see the Government Whip shaking his head —he is probably right. Still, the idea of pro and anti-Maastrichteers and marketeers, of Europhobes and Europhiles, coming to the Chamber to debate "retrocessionaire" tickled my fancy.

As for the debate on Maastricht next week, I should like to be here in person to abstain—but I will not be. *[Interruption.]* I am told that an abstention is the same as a vote one way or the other. The Bill lays down no geographical restrictions on the location of the head office of an applicant, which means that membership of Pool Reinsurance will be open to continental Europeans as well as offshore Europeans.

It pleases the Opposition that the Government are indulging in some intervention. We remain an interventionist party, so when we see the Government intervening we are moderately gratified and encouraged. Often enough, we have sat here and seen the Government, like Pontius Pilate, wash their hands. Sometimes they have wrung their hands like Scrooge; but on this occasion they have taken a firm grip on the problem. They have taken action and in that they have our full support.

The Minister rightly balanced the mechanisms needed in respect of the margin requirements. In the past three or four years, the insurance companies have faced difficulties in this area because of the massive claims made against them. The Minister did not, however, mention article 85 of the treaty of Rome, relating to competition. He may have seen comments in the press to the effect that the Bill may have implications for EC competition law.

The Minister will know that when a number of competing insurance undertakings enter into an agreement under which they will provide cover only through an agreed mechanism, and when this mechanism enables them to defend uniformly higher premiums in such a way as to minimise risk to themselves and to decrease cover for the insured, that arrangement may fall within the scope of article 85.

It can be argued that the Government have laid down what premiums Pool Reinsurance should collect from the insurers. Once the premiums have been set, however, companies may be minimising the risk to themselves and that may give rise to matters that the DTI will have to work out with the Commission. My view is that, as the reinsurance cover is not available at the moment, this measure acts to increase cover. There are thus difficulties ahead for the Government with the European Commission. As Harry Truman said, perhaps the buck stops here, with the DTI. In this case, I prefer the words of Dean Inge, who once said that, although he had had a great many problems, most of them had never happened. I hope that the same will apply to article 85.

I am convinced that the Commission will not want to intervene to prevent the Bill from being fully operative or to prevent the gap in the reinsurance market from being closed. There is another difficulty for the Government, who are setting the premiums for the insurance companies through Pool Reinsurance. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), who has left the Chamber, asked the Minister about that. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry. For those who read *Hansard* assiduously, let me make it clear that the hon. Gentleman is still in the Chamber. He asked the Minister about the impact of premiums. The danger for the Government would be if they set the premiums so high that the pool did not grow sufficiently to fulfil the purpose for which it was created. However, if the Government set premiums high, that would encourage competition from other reinsurers and bring them back into the market place.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill was retrospective to 1 January. That is my understanding, but I can see no reference anywhere in the Bill to 1 January, or indeed to any commencement date. In those circumstances, my understanding is that the Bill commences when it receives Royal Assent and not before.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing that to my attention. However, all the guidelines that I have received from the Department of Trade and Industry say that the Government's intention is that the Bill, when enacted, should be retrospective to 1 January. That will cover the niche in the market place caused when the reinsurers withdrew their cover at the end of last year. That is my understanding and I hope that the Minister will confirm it.

As far as I can tell from the Bill, the Minister has eschewed a policy of a compulsory levy on companies in designated areas. Having listened to the Minister with care, I would subscribe to that view. It is a matter for those involved to take out insurance as and when they wish, and how they wish. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) is in the Chamber. No doubt he will elaborate on that from the point of view of his constituents if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is right and proper that the Government should not, through their ultimate reinsurance cover, pick up the tab for looting, about which we have read a great deal in the newspapers. The Labour party has always believed, and still believes, in value for money. We have no intention of disbursing taxpayers' money gratuitously or abundantly in such a situation. What is remarkable is the number of people who come forward with a claim on insurance, and certainly on Government insurance, if they feel that they can. However, compensation for looting should be covered by general insurance policies. I am sure that, if those involved were to make a proper claim to their insurance companies, they would find that that was the case.

The Bill covers both damaged property and consequential losses arising from the interruption of business, so is not limited simply to the former. I agree with the Government on the point raised in the other place on 15 February this year, through a written question at column *62*. The question was whether that cover would include premises closed as a result of the threat of terrorism.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I seek clarification—perhaps from the hon. Gentleman, perhaps from the Minister—about compensation for looting. Looting is a risk that is not due to terrorism. If the building were left open, a claim for compensation for looting might be subject to question. If it were left open as a result of terrorist action, might not terrorist action be joined to the insurer's defence when resisting any such claim? There may be more complications here than meet the eye.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I had anticipated that point. One of the great things about speaking from the Dispatch Box is that one can sometimes anticipate interventions. The answer is that, in law, the claim would lie against the security firm rather than the insurance company. Victims of looting can make claims, but compensation does not necessarily lie through the route of the insurance policy.

I agree with the Government's view about the vacating of premises under threat, as expressed in the other place. They are also right to have the insured deal only with the insurers and to keep themselves at arm's length. That is sensible.

The scheme has the merit of keeping the Government's commitment to the minimum required by reinsurance. It places the burdens upon the insurance companies, when working out policies for commercial and industrial companies, and enables them to add on to the premium cover specific loss arising out of terrorist action. The Minister was right to say that that has been part of general insurance policies in the past. It will now be an add-on —to use a computing term—and provide for an additional 10 per cent. from insurance companies that are members of Pool Re and also for the realisation of investment income before there is a charge on the Exchequer.

The balance of the scheme is such that it should encourage other reinsurers to come into the field. It permits the insurance world to show the flexibility that is required in a fast-moving world with a fast-moving insurance market. It also gives the insurance world an opportunity to assist those in the community. One of the themes that the Opposition are developing is the role of insurance companies within the framework of the community. Rather than withdrawing from the community by withdrawing cover for such claims, the insurance world will come back into the community, with the Government as last-resort insurers. That means that business will be as usual in the complex world in which we live.

I would not wish to bore the House too much with technical detail, but I noticed the convoluted manner in which the total premium to be paid to the Government as the reinsurer of last resort will be calculated. It is a relief that the Government would not normally be entitled to require Pool Re to make premium payments unless the surplus in Pool Re exceeds £1,000 million, and that the sum paid at any time will be limited so that the surplus remaining in the fund will not be reduced to below £1,000 million.

I have seen a number of pessimistic forecasts in the press as to how much premium income the pool is likely to attract, but I am confident that the framework and the guidelines of the scheme will rectify a weakness that has developed in the reinsurance market, caused, as I have said, by a shortfall in capacity. This modest Bill involves the Treasury in modest terms and will show our determination that it will be business as usual for the City of London, as it will be elsewhere.

I shall end my remarks where I began. The Minister said that there is an infinitesimal likelihood that terrorist attacks will succeed. The Opposition say that there is a non-existent prospect that they will succeed. The message we give to the terrorists is the message with which we began—death and destruction may follow from their actions, but political decisions will not.

6.8 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), and to support what he has said. It is a particular pleasure that the House should be attended by hon. Members from all the component parts of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. It is also a pleasure that the House is in whole-hearted agreement on the necessity for the measure, for the reasons given so eloquently by the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill is, in one sense, interventionist, but it comes from a Government who are pragmatic in the way that they administer the governance of the United Kingdom. The principal reason for the Bill is to underline our determination that illegal acts of terrorism shall not be the means by which political changes occur. It is important that the House is united in that endeavour, since that will lead inevitably to the defeat of terrorism in the United Kingdom.

I am also glad to welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister and to comment upon some of its aspects. First, however, I shall refer to the report of the commissioner of police for the City of London, published a few days ago, which makes it clear that, despite the incidence of terrorist attacks in the City—St. Mary Axe in 1992 and, sadly, more recently the Bishopsgate bomb—the fact of the matter is that the City of London police force has achieved what few police forces in the United Kingdom have so far achieved, in that its overall recorded crime figures show a decrease of 10·6 per cent., which, as the report says,

"is very much against the national trend and a greater decrease than any other Force in the country, many of which are in fact showing an increase."

The report says that the City of London, despite those isolated and horrific bomb incidents,

"is still a relatively safe and civilised area in which to live, visit or do business. It is important to keep that perspective as, given the hundreds of thousands of people who frequent the City daily, the statistical chance of being harmed by criminal or terrorist activity is still extremely low."

We should bear that point in mind.

I take this opportunity to commend the City of London police, a small but special police force that has rendered exceptional service under difficult circumstances and has built up a remarkable expertise in dealing with the problem of terrorism. For example, although the St. Mary Axe

[Sir John Wheeler]

bomb blew the bomb car to smithereens, the City of London police scene of crime officers managed to scour through every fragment to discover sufficient evidence to identify the vehicle, which in turn led them to a suspect, and an arrest and charge have been made. Terrorism can be defeated, and one of the purposes of the Bill is to emphasise our support for the police service in that determination.

During the recent outrages, both in 1992 and this year, the citizens of the City of London, in common with the whole country, I believe, have greatly admired the leadership of both the previous and the present lord mayors of the City of London, and the determination of the corporation as a whole to rally and organise the commercial community so that the people who commit terrorist outrages do not succeed in their primary endeavour.

The proposals before us are necessary and welcome. I know that the Association of British Insurers was greatly concerned about the difficulties that it faced, to which my hon. Friend the Minister rightly referred. The mechanism that we propose to put in place will be both fair to the taxpayer and reasonable in its objective.

I thank my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade for the way in which he has responded to my concerns on behalf of my constituents in the city of Westminster who live in expensive blocks of flats which, as the Minister has explained, would have been treated as commercial properties, on which there would have been an especially high premium to pay. Many elderly people and people on lower than average incomes would have found the additional premiums hard to bear, and it was important that they should not become the victims of terrorist outrages by virtue of a substantial increase in their insurance premiums.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his practical and sensible response to that problem. As my hon. Friend the Minister has explained, for many people living in blocks of flats in my constituency, the additional premium, on a flat rate basis, may be no more than about £14. That is indeed bearable and, on behalf of my constituents, I am glad to thank the Government.

As for the commencement of the Bill, it is right on this exceptional occasion that the House should depart from its regular objection to retrospective legislation and ensure that the measure be made effective from 1 January this year. We breach no precedent in doing that; this is an exceptional measure to deal with a particular situation, and it is right that we should allow an element of retrospective legislation.

The Prime Minister responded to a question that I asked him after the Bishopsgate bomb by saying that the House would have such a measure before it at the earliest opportunity. My right hon. Friend has honoured that pledge in bringing the Bill before the House, and it is a matter for great satisfaction to us all that both sides of the House should be united in the endeavour to take the Bill speedily on to the statute book in the interests of defeating terrorism and supporting the British people.

6.16 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am certainly glad to add my voice and that of the Liberal Democrats to welcome the proposals, especially as they end a degree of uncertainty that needed to be resolved in a constructive fashion. As a Member who represents a Scottish constituency and who believes that the United Kingdom needs some fundamental political changes, I must also say that such changes must be brought about by the democratic process.

There is no doubt that such a measure was essential, because there was a danger that the terrorists might have been given another target, in the sense of being able not only to maim and injure people but to seek to bring down corporations, too, and thus to create more economic disruption than the mere disruption of offices that results from the damage that they inflict.

The Government were right to seek a balance. We could not have witnessed too prolonged an exchange in which the Government were saying, fundamentally, that it was the responsibility of the insurance industry to take the risks, and the insurance industry was saying that it would withdraw altogether from that risk area. That gap could not have been allowed to continue for long, and we welcome the fact that the Government have understood that, and have introduced a scheme that seeks, in a sense, to go back into partnership with the industry and to ensure that the industry and the ultimate buyer of insurance make their contribution in terms that appear fair, balanced and reasonable.

There are people far better equipped than I to rake over the details and raise concerns and anomalies. The Minister said that the measure had been carefully thought through, but that the Government were willing to consider any representations that might be made. In view of the spirit in which the Bill has been introduced, I am sure that any such representations will be welcomed and accepted constructively.

There is justice in what the Government are trying to do. I cannot calculate exactly whether they have got the balance completely right, but the thrust is certainly right. Making the Government the insurer, or reinsurer, of last resort is the right approach, rather than providing blank-cheque compensation. The Minister made it clear that the virtue of that approach was that it retained the inherent merits of continuing to operate a proper insurance scheme that will probably function on normal commercial lines, with the consequent speed of response. Clearly that was necessary, and one hopes that it will eliminate wrangling.

I welcome the fact that the Minister made it clear that, while the objective of the Government's scheme is ultimately to achieve no cost, the guarantee is absolute, and the objective of no cost will not lead to any possibility of their failing to honour their reinsurance obligations. That is absolutely crucial, because the Government are the last resort, and if those obligations are not honoured there is nowhere else to turn.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) mentioned taxi drivers, and the Minister responded robustly and in a constructive way. Although the hon. Member will pursue his case, and I encourage him to do so and hope that he will secure a sympathetic response, it is very important that it is understood that, when this Bill becomes law, nobody is absolved of the obligation to make

the calculation of insuring or not. It must be made very clear to people that, while it is regrettable that the climate in which we live has increased the costs that we have to bear, that calculation must be made. One cannot be foolhardy and try to cut corners, consequently leaving oneself exposed.

Nobody can be in any doubt that anybody who fails to take that necessary step will not be entitled to seek compensation from outside. It is important, and I am sure that the Government will make it clear, that that is fully understood as widely as possible.

The different scheme in Northern Ireland may be interesting as a comparison, because it is troubles arising from Northern Ireland that have made this scheme necessary. It unites all Members in the commitment to ensure that neither by commercial nor by physically violent means can terrorism prevail. I believe that some practical common sense and ingenuity has been shown here, and that the insurance industry has responded.

I spent a day at Lloyd's a few weeks ago, when I was made very well aware of the concern there about the fact that 3,000 people have effectively been ruined by that operation, and that many jobs will now be lost. It was made clear to me that, in addition to the large risks which the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has already identified, the consequences of climatic change have had a serious effect upon Lloyd's, because it has led to a number of violent wind storms, for which Lloyd's was the reinsurer.

It may well be that, in its heyday, Lloyd's could have taken up the risk with which the Government are now faced. However, in the circumstances in which it is now placed, it would be very foolhardy indeed to add that risk to those from which it is still trying to recover.

I therefore welcome the fact that, after what might be described as initial spats—perhaps understandable and justifiable—between the Government and the insurance industry, the position taken by the Department of Trade and Industry in this Bill has prevailed, uncertainty and anxiety have been laid to rest, and a properly orchestrated scheme on a proper insurance basis will now be put in place to fill the gap from the day the insurance company withdrew the original cover.

I hope that the Bill can make speedy progress and that it will be noted outside the House that it had total all-party, all-Member support.

6.23 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I begin by declaring some interest as having been involved in insurance for 20 years, as an adviser to the Institute of Insurance Brokers and as an elected member of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council. Perhaps more important on this issue, although it is not an interest to declare, we have an all-party insurance financial services group, which I chair and which has been very active in discussing with the Government and the industry how to deal with this dreadful problem of terrorism cover.

I pay a tribute to my hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State and to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. They will know how difficult it has been for all of us, given the sensitivity of this issue, to discuss —I think that this will be taken in the right way—how to bring pressure to bear on the Government to recognise that something needed to be done. It was very late in December before we finally reached agreement on how to proceed, but the reception that our approach received was not just extremely courteous, but very understanding. The fact that this Bill and the scheme that it underwrites so closely reflect the general principles that we put to my hon. Friend and his colleagues and officials at the DTI clearly indicates that they listened very carefully to the representations of the industry.

I have said that I am a member of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council. Our office has been affected by both bombs. I was in Bishopsgate last week and I have seen the devastation caused by the second explosion. It left me with very mixed feelings. Above all, it strengthened my belief that, when we stand up in the House and say that terrorism will not prevail, that the bullet and bomb will not change the course of British politics or politics in Northern Ireland, it is not just because that has to be the way, but also because it is an absolute outrage that such acts should be perpetrated. I was moved by the way in which the people who work in the City, the police and the contractors putting right the damage carried on. They deserve the highest possible praise and support.

We have all said, in the wake of these two outrages in the City of London and others elsewhere throughout the United Kingdom, that the terrorists will not win; life goes on. This measure is designed to ensure that life can go on, that businesses can be up and running as quickly as is humanly possible.

In the discussion that we have had already, some concern has been expressed about whether the Bill as drafted can be retrospective to 1 January. I am in no doubt about that. As I understand it—perhaps my hon. Friend will confirm this in winding up—the Bill gives Parliament's approval to the Treasury paying out of public funds the money needed to underwrite Pool Re: in effect, to pay out money to support any agreement entered into by the President of the Board of Trade. He made that agreement at the end of last year, so what we are doing here is providing the funding for the agreement that he has already freely entered into.

Again, I pay a tribute to the Government for the way in which they so quickly made clear after the recent outrage in Bishopsgate that moneys would be forthcoming and that there would be no difficulty with this scheme because we had not yet passed the Bill through Parliament.

In his introductory speech, my hon. Friend talked about all those who consider themselves to be at risk and said that it was in their commercial interest to insure. I suggest that we should go further. I believe that we should discourage selection on the basis of whether people ought to have terrorist cover. It is a simplistic argument, but one does not say to one's insurance company that flood damage should be excluded because the house is on the top of a hill.

The whole principle of insurance is one of mutual cover, mutual risk and mutual funding. What we have seen in the past year or so must tell us all that no one can be sure where terrorists will choose to strike. Yes, there are some potential targets—we all acknowledge that—but I feel strongly that it is the duty of the House to discourage selection. I take my hon. Friend the Minister's point that there should not be compulsion, but I think that we should encourage businesses to avail themselves of the Pool Re facility. The Minister gave a vivid example of the fact that,

[Mr. John Greenway]

in the full context of the overall picture of business costs, the costs of taking advantage of Pool Re in extra premium terms are very small.

There are two principles that business men ought to acknowledge: first, that it can happen to them, and, secondly, that, if it does, it will not affect their ability or the resolve of their businesses to continue. That means that every business needs a strategy for management of the risk that terrorism represents. That strategy embraces three elements. First, it must mean increased vigilance. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) rightly paid tribute to the work of the police in the City of London. Indeed, the police throughout London have done a tremendous job in the face of terrorist activities and we ought not to forget that many potential bomb threats have been intercepted with tremendous skill and with the use of intelligence. We need to get across the question of vigilance to the public and to the business community. I do not want to dwell on that point today because I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that everything that can be done will be done in that regard.

Secondly, businesses must have an emergency plan. After the St. Mary Axe bomb, everybody was overwhelmed with admiration for the speed with which Commercial Union, the worst affected by the bomb, was able to respond. There has been no real impact on its business because it had an emergency plan ready to put into operation. Following that, many other businesses in the City of London did the same and those plans were put into effect speedily and with tremendous skill during the recent outrage in Bishopsgate. That is a lesson that businesses throughout the country need to take on board.

Thirdly, the element in the strategy on which I place the greatest reliance is the need for insurance. The Bill makes that possible. It is largely an enabling Bill and there is much detail still to be thrashed out. I know that the Department of Trade and Industry is approaching the Bill in a constructive way. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledges that if there are still some issues to rehearse in detail—issues that might have been rehearsed during the Committee stage of a similar Bill—such rehearsal would not be appropriate tonight. There will be an opportunity to raise concerns directly with him and his officials will be available at a later stage.

Will my hon. Friend think again about the need for a separate certificate of insurance for terrorism? I should have preferred us to deal with the issue in the following way. Everyone has made it clear that unless one takes advantage of the Pool Re facility or makes some other arrangement, one will not be insured. It is clear to the policyholder on the renewal documents, which have been sent out by insurance companies since the end of last year, that the £100,000 limit per item of claim is clear and that everything else is excluded. For that reason, we can perhaps avoid the need for a separate certificate of insurance for terrorism when people buy cover in future.

I was also encouraged by what my hon. Friend the Minister said about the need to contain bureaucracy and to make the scheme as simple as possible. There is a problem about the degree of information that has to be provided to obtain quotations. However, I welcome the fact that the Department has agreed to review its requirements in that area.

Commission is another relevant point. When we put the scheme together and asked the Government to be reinsurers of last resort, I argued strongly that there should not be a commission element on the extra payment into the pool. With hindsight, I think that that was a mistake. I believe that there should be some element of commission for two reasons. First, it is important that businesses take up the cover, so we need to have some incentive. Secondly, brokers may try to seek alternative markets for cover which pay commission and that would undermine the viability of the Pool Re scheme. I shall come to the point about alternatives in a moment. There is a significant work load in relation to the scheme itself and in relation to claims. I believe, therefore, that we should re-examine the commission argument.

Other reinsurance schemes are being considered. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) raised the point about potential problems with the EC over competition policy. We have agreed that there should not be compulsion. No one suggests that every business man is being compelled to insure through the scheme. Alternatives will be provided—indeed, I understand that that is happening already. For that reason, I encourage everyone to take advantage of Pool Re.

Over three to five years, there is no reason why the scheme should not be in equilibrium in terms of funding and there is no reason why the objective that we all sought to achieve at the beginning of the exercise—that there should be no ultimate cost to the taxpayer—should not be achieved.

I give a warm welcome to the Bill. I again thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his work so far and for the work that he will continue to do on this important matter.

6.37 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I, too, welcome the opportunity to raise matters pertaining to insurance in this debate. It is clear from the number of hon. Members who have remained to take part in the debate that the subject is serious, especially because the problems of Northern Ireland are now transferring to the mainland. Many people are extremely concerned about what is happening. I have no time for terrorism, as I have stated in the past. What is happening will cause severe grief unless serious action is taken to try to resolve the situation in Northern Ireland. However, I am here to speak not about the position in Northern Ireland, but about insurance claims.

In the past year in my constituency and in my area, we have had several problems with terrorism. A bomb was left at White Hart Lane station in my constituency and a bomb went off in Wood Green shopping city in my area. Garages in Muswell Hill have been raided and explosives have been found. So the situation is serious and I for one am angry that the IRA should seek to use terrorist methods at all, but certainly not in working-class areas where the people are poor and must struggle to make a living. It is particularly in this regard that I wish to look at the question of insurance.

I welcome the Bill and I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said. I was interested in his point about the Government's intervention in this specific area. I, too, am pleased that they are

intervening. It is not usual for this Government to intervene—they talk about market forces taking care of everything—yet here we see them directly intervening. I believe that one of the reasons for their intervention is their moral obligation to look after the security of everyone—big business, my constituents and everyone else. So they feel that they must do something to protect people's security.

The Government must protect not only the interests and property of rich people in the City, but the interests and property of people in my area, working-class people. It is in this regard that I mention two of my constituents who were the minicab drivers involved in incidents on the same night as the NatWest tower and other buildings in the City were blown up.

One of my constituents was approached by two men, one of whom held a gun to his head. The second man got into the seat beside him and they ordered him to drive towards various destinations. The driver of one of the minicabs told me that the person sitting next to him was priming the bomb, putting the wires together, setting the timer and so on, right next to him in the same vehicle. After they had been going some time, they placed the bomb, now live, underneath his seat and, with a gun to his head, told him to drive to 10 Downing street. They took away the wing mirrors and inside rear mirror and told him that they would be driving behind him and that if he tried to stop or leave the vehicle they would shoot him. Then they got out.

My constituent then set off for Downing street, but after he had gone about 50 yards he stopped his cab, got out of it, hailed a bus driver who was passing and, with his help, contacted the police. He himself stood in the road, waved people down, told them that there was a bomb in the car and stopped other people being injured. After some time the police came, the place was cordoned off and the car blew up. Roughly the same thing happened to my second constituent whose car stopped somewhere in the King's Cross area.

I mention these points because this was not just a case of people abandoning their cars and running for their lives. The two people concerned acted in a very public-spirited manner and saved not only their own lives but the lives of others in the vicinity. In doing so they were able to prevent any destruction of property as well as of lives.

Since the incident my constituents have experienced a number of problems. First, they are unable to claim compensation. This is where we come to the question of the insurance. I understand that, for various reasons, these drivers took out a hire and reward insurance third party only, which means that if they have an accident and the other party suffers damage they are covered for that, but their own vehicles are not insured and they get no compensation from the insurance company for them.

That is what concerns me because, while the Minister may say that they have the option of going for comprehensive insurance, which would have given them compensation, the fact is that when my constituents took out insurance they did not expect that the IRA would hold a gun to their heads, put bombs in their cars and blow them to bits. It is not, therefore, a normal, everyday risk, and that is my argument. They acted properly in getting third party insurance as required by law. They had no idea that they would be in this situation. It is not an everyday occurrence. It may be that in Northern Ireland, where such things happen fairly regularly, minicab drivers will accept the possibility of being forced to take on board a terrorist bomb and will see the need to insure against it specifically. But here on the mainland it is not a regular occurrence, so we cannot expect drivers to take on such liabilities. Now that it has happened on at least three occasions, minicab drivers will be well advised in future to take out comprehensive insurance, but at the moment, because such things have seldom happened, they feel it unnecessary to take out the full insurance.

On that basis, I appeal to the Minister to find some way of getting compensation for these drivers. They are self-employed people whose livelihood has been totally destroyed, and because they cannot claim compensation they cannot work.

I asked the Library to give me some advice on compensation. I was told that if the drivers' cars had been burnt during a riot or looting or something like that, under the Riot Act they would have been compensated. If a person's car is set on fire by a bunch of football hooligans, for example, he can get compensation from the police, but if it is blown up by the IRA and set on fire he cannot claim compensation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman has answered his own point. The purpose of the Bill is not to provide compensation but merely to provide at a commercial premium rate an insurance service which otherwise would not be available. Similarly, in the case of damage to real property, in circumstances where an insured had not taken out an insurance policy covering it for the particular kind of damage which was suffered, the provisions of the Bill would not provide retrospectively compensation to pay for the damage suffered. So we are not treating the owners of commercial real property in any way differently from the owners of motor cars, as in the case that the hon. Gentleman has brought before the House this afternoon. We are seeking to plug a gap in the market, although the Bill will apply to contracts of insurance entered into as from 1 January. We are not bringing in a compensation scheme.

Mr. Grant: I thank the Minister for that. I understand and support what the Bill is doing. What I am demonstrating to the Minister is that there is a loophole in insurance law generally. I do not say that an amendment could not be tabled—I do not know how things are done—but, although I support the Bill, I am suggesting that this is something else to be looked at. Not only have problems arisen about compensation and loss of livelihood, but the men concerned have been offered no protection. One suspected person has been identified and arrested and, at some stage, my constituents will be called on to give evidence against the people concerned, but no protection has been provided for them.

Those men are totally traumatised, but have had no counselling. One of my constituents is a refugee from Ethiopia. He told me yesterday that he had run away from a traumatic situation there only to arrive in Britain and find himself in another traumatic situation. Perhaps it was because of his experience of dangerous situations in Ethiopia that he was able to act in a public-spirited manner and prevent a further tragedy.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who spoke for the insurance groups, rightly talked about how brave the City workers were to go back to work and about the good work of the fire brigade and the police. I agree

[Mr. Grant]

with him, but my constituents have also had a very traumatic experience. No one has said that they are brave. No one has been to see them; the Prime Minister has not written to them to thank them for not delivering the bombs that they were ordered to deliver. When we give praise to people like the workers who turned up for work the next day, I hope that the people in high positions will also think about my constituents who also had a very traumatic experience.

I hope that there are no more incidents, but, being pragmatic and the situation being what it is, I suspect that there might be. I would like the Government to consider whether there is a way in which my constituents, who have only third party insurance, can be helped. People in my constituency are working for £80 per week; they have to struggle to pay the insurance premium before they can go out and earn their living. I am not talking about people who have a lot of money and can afford to pay £2,000 for comprehensive insurance. One of the cars which was blown up was worth only £1,500, so paying £2,000 for comprehensive insurance is just not worth it. I would be very pleased if some arrangement could be made whereby the Government make an ex gratia payment in recognition of my constituents' actions.

The owners of the minicab firm—Alan's Minicab Services—have set up a trust fund for the people concerned because they, other minicab drivers and the local people feel that something should be done for them. I hope that the Government can find a way in which to ensure that people who are caught, by poverty, with third party insurance obtain some compensation or relief from the problems that they have been forced into facing.

6.53 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am sure that the whole House will have considerable sympathy for the two constituents of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), both of whom acted in a completely publicly spirited manner.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and my hon. Friend the Minister on introducing the Bill. Towards the end of last year they responded very quickly to the situation that arose, when it became clear that there would be no possibility of reinsurance in the market. I know that the way in which they responded to events in the market has been widely welcomed by insurance companies and insurance brokers. I am an adviser to the British Investment and Insurance Brokers Association and I can tell the House that it, too, welcomes the Bill.

We are all very conscious of the background against which the Bill is introduced. I reiterate what every hon. Member has already said—that a measure of this kind is essential if we are to demonstrate to the IRA our determination that they will not win under any circumstances.

I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister one or two questions about the Bill. In some respects, the Bill could be described, I think he might agree, as a bit of a blank cheque. It does not have a date on it and I would like a date to be inserted, even if the agreement has the date 1 January 1993, which I understand to be the case.

When my hon. Friend responds to the debate, will he give some information about how he will report on financial progress? If we give the Government a blank cheque in this respect, we will need regular information about how the scheme is progressing. My hon. Friend described the Bill as a market solution. I welcome the fact that it is as near to a market solution as we can achieve, given that it involves Government intervention, as has been recognised. I believe that Government intervention is justified where there is market failure, as in this case, and I commend my hon. Friend's scheme. I take my hon. Friend's point that, in the long run, there will be no cost to the taxpayer. That is what we hope and believe.

It is just not the case that it is a market solution, with low costs and, in the end, no cost to the taxpayer. There may be considerable costs to the taxpayer in the interim period because of cash flow disadvantages. The Government may sometimes have to pay out large sums of money and be unable to recover them until some subsequent, unspecified time.

For that reason, it would be helpful if we could hear a little more about the arrangements for reporting on what happens to Pool Re, which is a company limited by guarantee, as my hon. Friend the Minister explained. Presumably, like any other limited liability company, it will, in due course, file accounts at Companies House. We will then be able to judge the position of the company, some months after the end of its financial year. Does my hon. Friend have other proposals in mind for reporting on how things go?

Perhaps my hon. Friend can tell us how things have gone so far, because we are now in month five of the new arrangement. It would be helpful to know about the extent to which, to date, people have participated in the new arrangement and the amounts of premiums that have been paid into the company. It would also be helpful to know whether my hon. Friend believes that it may be necessary to pay any claims arising from the Bishopsgate bomb.

Those factors are important when one reads the financial memorandum, which states—I understand why it could say nothing else—that "no precise estimate is possible" of the cost to the Government of the arrangements envisaged. Although my hon. Friend has said that the costs to the taxpayer will be low and that, in the end, the taxpayer will not lose out, I should like to hear about the arrangements for reporting on progress.

I reaffirm my support for the Bill, which has the universal support of the House. In the circumstances, the Bill is essential and I wish my hon. Friend every success in implementing it.

6.58 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In common with every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate, I support the Bill. Although it is not the right measure to deal with the issue, I accept that it is necessary that something should be done. The Bill and the scheme that it underwrites at least have the merit of being put into operation speedily. In an ideal world, however, I would suggest that the Government should adopt a different scheme.

The event that finally galvanised the Government into acting on the problem was the bombing last year of the Baltic Exchange. The subsequent events were not surprising, but at the time of the bomb, what struck those

of us who represent Northern Ireland were the incredible estimates of loss that were produced. People immediately produced estimates of £700 million and more. At that time last year the total bill for all the bombing incidents in Northern Ireland over 20 years, in terms of criminal damage payments, was significantly less than that. I do not have the precise figures with me, but I think £400 million to £500 million would be on the high side. Yet so-called insurance experts produced such incredible figures.

As Mr. McKittrick, *The Independent* correspondent, rightly said recently in a newspaper article, after the Baltic Exchange bomb the Republican leadership was "surprised and delighted" at what was said—surprised because, evidently, it did not expect the bill for damage to be so high, and delighted at the panic-stricken reaction. It was inevitable, in the light of that, that there would be more bombs in London. It is further inevitable following the reaction after Bishopsgate, for we saw the same degree of exaggeration. That applied to reaction in terms of estimates, with people talking straightaway about a bill of £1 billion, and making exaggerated comments about the scale of the damage.

I wish London journalists would learn to tell the difference between structural and superficial damage. There was serious structural damage to the church outside which the bomb was placed, but it was obvious to anybody looking at the huge photographs in the newspapers, which occupied far too much space, that the damage to the office blocks was entirely superficial. I was in London on that Saturday morning. I was travelling to Liverpool street station when the bomb went off. Lest people are curious about that, I should perhaps explain that I was travelling for the entirely innocent purpose of going to Essex for an Orange parade. The following day I was in Belfast and had a chance to catch up with the papers and look at the photographs. It was clear to me and my colleagues there that the damage was superficial.

I wish that people would be more restrained in that respect. They should also accept that businesses must learn from the regrettable experience of their counterparts in Northern Ireland, who have had to deal with the situation for far too long. It is possible to have contingency plans. Businesses should gear the way in which they operate to enable them to get back into operation quickly. Regrettably, we in Northern Ireland have had to get back to business quickly. It can be done. It is not the end of the world. Indeed, that is one way in which the man in the street and the ordinary business man can do his bit to beat terrorism. He can demonstrate that it is possible to get back to business quickly and without any undue fuss.

Although there have been two major bombs, Bishopsgate and the Baltic Exchange, the point must be made—this is why I said that we are debating a belated measure—that the danger of major incidents such as those has existed for a long time. That danger still exists and it is greater than people in England realise. For some time, the Provisional IRA has probably—I say "probably" because I cannot be precise—been putting greater resources into its bombing campaign in England than into its entire terrorist operation in Northern Ireland. By greater resources, I mean the commitment of skilled manpower, money and the rest.

Over the years, the IRA has built up an infrastructure in England which enables it to conduct a sustained campaign. Last year, more than 20 tonnes of home-made explosives were recovered in London alone—and every last ounce of that was probably manufactured in London. I asked the Home Secretary a question about that in the middle of last year, and although he did not disagree with the estimate he did not do what he should have done and make the public aware of the position. Manufacturing home-made explosive takes time and a large number of people. If the public are properly alerted about what to look out for, it should be possible for them to play their part in suppressing the campaign, but they must be told how to be vigilant and how to assist the authorities. It does no good in the current situation to pretend that there is not a problem and thus fail to involve the public fully in the fight against terrorism. A tremendous resource is available in terms of potential public support, but it is not being fully utilised.

The Minister referred to comparable arrangements in Northern Ireland and said that legislation had existed both in Northern Ireland and in Ireland to deal with costs arising out of this kind of situation, and he is right—it has existed for not far short of 300 years. I should welcome the opportunity to dilate on some of the advantages of that 18th century legislation, which contains some interesting features. Any hon. Member who wishes to discuss the matter with me is welcome to do so after the debate.

The Bill applies to Great Britain and its provisions do not extend to Northern Ireland. May I be assured that in no circumstances will the provisions be extended to Northern Ireland, that the existing Northern Ireland legislation will remain substantially in place and that the cover and provisions for compensation will not be diminished by any temptation to extend provisions of this type to Northern Ireland? I want that assurance because I consider the provisions in the Bill to be inadequate. They are not good enough, and they are certainly not so good as the statutory provisions in Northern Ireland. I should hate to see the Northern Ireland position undermined as a result of the introduction of measures such as these. We in Northern Ireland do not want to be driven back into taking a market-based approach, particularly in view of the record of some English financial institutions in regard to the problems of Belfast over the years. Apart from that, I am referring to a matter of general principle.

Hon. Members may have gathered that I regard the provisions in Northern Ireland as better than those in the Bill. They are better because the statutory provisions in Northern Ireland are comprehensive. This reinsurance arrangement will not be comprehensive. Under the existing provisions in Northern Ireland, wherever property is damaged as the result of violence or terrorist activity there is provision for compensation. Under the reinsurance arrangement before the House, compensation insurance will be available only to people who first take out insurance to cover the terrorist risk.

I made that point in an intervention in the speech of the Minister, and it was made by the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) when he referred to people who lost out in the incident of which he spoke. He paid tribute to those people, and I underwrite that tribute. They behaved in a highly responsible and brave way, but even if they had not behaved so bravely I should have thought that they would still have a good claim on the public purse for compensation. And it is not just taxi drivers—the same could happen to anyone. Any driver could find his or her car being hijacked and used for a similar purpose. Must every person who owns a car in Britain stop and think about the risk? The Minister said that people who felt

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themselves to be at risk should take out additional insurance. How can the man in the street or the ordinary business man assess the risk that he may be facing?

It is wrong to think that the risk exists only in the City of London. We know how adept the Provisional IRA is at switching from one area to another. As soon as it is anticipated that the IRA will do one thing, it switches and does the unexpected. That is the way terrorist organisations operate—the risk could be anywhere. We have reason to suspect that there is a significant terrorist infrastructure in London. There is also reason to suspect that there is a significant terrorist infrastructure in the north-west of England. There may be others elsewhere. We do not know what structures have been set up. We do not know what sleepers there are elsewhere. The risk is not confined to certain geographic locations or to certain categories of persons. The risk is more general.

It is inadequate to say to the public, "You should take action only if you feel yourselves at risk." The reason why legislation was originally introduced for Ireland in the 18th century, which was not a period of Government interventionism, was that it was recognised—correctly—that there is a particular responsibility upon Governments to maintain public order. That is one of the primary purposes of Government. What we are dealing with here are the risks and the damage which affect people as a result of a failure to maintain public order. That is why there is compensation for riot damage, and that is why there ought also to be compensation for damage caused by terrorists.

The primary advantage of the legislation in Northern Ireland is that it is comprehensive. Another of its advantages is that there is a degree of governmental control. Because the compensation scheme is administered by the Government, they have a measure of control over its operation. After major terrorist incidents, one serious danger is that there will be fraudulent claims. What measures will be taken, in terms of the Pool Reinsurance agreements, to cover that? Will the Government just rely upon the insurance companies to detect fraud? Will the insurance companies have an economic interest in detecting fraud, or will they be tempted to pass on the risk to the insurer of last resort, the Government?

Under the criminal damage legislation, there is a statutory framework within which one can determine the extent of consequential loss. What will be the position under these arrangements? Will the extent of cover for consequential loss differ from one insurance company to another, with the Government merely picking up the tab through the pool, or will policies contain standard terms to ensure equal cover?

What will happen about betterment? That is a significant problem. When there is damage of this nature, the person whose property is destroyed gets new for old when he rebuilds, and in some respects is better off. One suspects that some businesses in Northern Ireland have prospered because of the number of times that they have been blown up. I am thinking of hotel businesses. The result is that now they have much bigger and better hotels than they ever had to begin with. An ironic consequence of the campaign is this question of betterment. What provision will be made by insurance policies to deal with it? There may be other factors, too.

I will say no more about the Northern Ireland legislation. I merely say that I believe that the Northern Ireland scheme is superior to this one. It may have been thought necessary to introduce this legislation because it is speedy and setting up a proper compensation scheme would take longer, but the best thing to do in the long run is to have a proper compensation scheme.

This last-minute measure, which the Minister says is temporary, smacks to some extent of the Government's whole approach to the problem of terrorism—a little half-hearted and a little too late. The Government are not committed to dealing with the problem. I detected that approach in the Minister's final comments. He referred to the underlying problem and said that terrorism would not succeed because the IRA had failed to move the Government an inch. That ought to be the position—I wish to God it were—but everyone knows that it is not.

Terrorist operations have moved the Government quite a considerable distance in terms of compromising the integrity of the United Kingdom, in terms of eliminating the democratic process in Northern Ireland, in terms of giving the parties which share the objectives of terrorism a say in the government of Northern Ireland, and sometimes in terms of appearing, as the Government did in the recent talks, to be neutral about the Union. The way to defeat terrorism is to be positive about the Union and to demonstrate clearly that the Government oppose not just the means that the terrorists adopt but also their objectives.

7.14 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The House has listened with keen interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). Having served as a Northern Ireland Minister, I understand the points that he made. I agree with him completely that Great Britain has a great deal to learn from Northern Ireland in terms of its response to terrorist incidents and in terms of showing its determination not to be overwhelmed by terrorist pressure.

The fact that sometimes the media get over-excited may lead to a misinterpretation of the public's attitude to terrorism. The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) spoke movingly on behalf of his constituents. He showed in his graphic speech, to which we listened with keen interest, just how widespread the damage done by terrorism can be and how completely universal is the revulsion against terrorism.

To follow up one point that was made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann, it is not for me to answer on behalf of the Government, but the hon. Gentleman said that there is a significant difference between the Northern Ireland and Great Britain schemes. He praised the benefits of the Northern Ireland scheme and asked what would happen about betterment in the Great Britain scheme.

As I understand it, the scheme for Great Britain which we are now discussing walks around that problem. The initiative for sorting out the problem will remain with insurance companies. The Government will merely stand behind them and prevent insurance schemes from being blown aside by the present lack of reinsurance. The detailed problem relating to betterment will not arise under the Great Britain scheme, because control over that matter will remain with the insurance companies.

I asked the Minister to spell out the difference between the proposed scheme for Great Britain and the scheme that operates in Northern Ireland. I thought it appropriate that it should be on the record that there is a difference between the two schemes; I thought it appropriate, too, that the Government's explanation of why there should be a different scheme for Great Britain should be on the record. When I asked that question, I was not seeking to suggest that the Great Britain scheme should be comparable to the Northern Ireland scheme. The two situations are different. Therefore, I warmly welcome the scheme that the Minister has laid before the House today. I believe it to be the right scheme for Great Britain.

I declare an interest, to which I referred during my intervention. I am an elected member of the council of Lloyd's of London, and since 1973 I have been an underwriting member of Lloyd's. I declare that interest in much the same way as a house owner might declare an interest when the value of his mortgage exceeds the value of his house. It is a negative interest this year. Nevertheless, I declare my interest in Lloyd's with pride, for it has been the focal point of insurance in the United Kingdom for the past 300 years. It is a crucial part of the success of the City of London in making London the centre of the insurance market.

Lloyd's leads in most major insurance risks and is now fighting valiantly, in my view, to put its house in order so as to win back the confidence that has certainly been prejudiced and lost as a result of the terrible losses of recent years. I am confident that Lloyd's will fight its way back. In parentheses, may I say that Lloyd's very much appreciates the interest and the understanding of its situation that has been shown by the Minister and the staff of the Department of Trade and Industry. Having said that, however, I must point out that I do not in any sense speak on behalf of Lloyd's. My speech is entirely on my own account.

It was necessary that a scheme such as this should be brought before the House. Late in 1992, it became apparent that the reinsurance interests—the big continental and American reinsurance companies and groups, through which much of the insurance of the City of London and other parts of the United Kingdom is frequently placed—had been destabilised and that they were not confident about continuing their reinsurance arrangements. The result was that the insurance market was destabilised. Therefore, it became necessary to introduce a stabilising element.

I believe that I was the first to raise this issue on the Floor of the House, late in 1992. I did so with diffidence, because I was sad to think that a stabilisation measure should be necessary. Nevertheless, it was necessary. Industrial interests made this very clear to the Government. The insurance industry was not making the point that it required support or subsidy; it was spelling out in clear terms the fact that insurance would not be available if reinsurance were not available and that if insurance in the City of London were not available it might be impossible for companies to continue to operate there. Thus the position of the City as a world capital market might be under threat.

There is no question of insurance interests seeking support subsidy in that sense. What they need is stability. In urging the Government to act, they were not speaking on their own behalf. It is quite clear that they were pushing at a door that was ready to open. The Government were looking carefully at the whole issue and Ministers were quick to come forward with an appropriate measure. I repeat that there is no question of this Bill's representing a subsidy for the insurance industry. The medium-term intention is that it should be a stabilising measure and that it should be neutral in terms of Government cost. I suspect that in the short term there will be an element of subsidy. A number of matters will have to be explored very carefully in Committee. These days, every Bill states whether there will be an additional demand by way of public-sector manpower. I see that in this case two additional posts in the Department of Trade and Industry will be required. I am afraid that the two people appointed will have to work extremely hard in the next year or two.

Of all industries, the insurance industry is international and is responsive to market forces. I have already referred to the fact that, although London is the centre of the insurance world, it uses extensive overseas reinsurance facilities. As the industry is so international and so responsive to market forces, premiums will respond quickly to perceived risk. I believe that the situation will stabilise rapidly, thanks to the measures that are being taken.

I welcome the Bill. It will stabilise the industry and, in due course, enable the Government to withdraw. As I have said already, many points will have to be raised in Committee. I am sure that hon. Members look forward to making their points at that stage. In the meantime, I thank the Government for introducing the measure, which I thoroughly welcome.

7.22 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) referred to the memorandum on the financial effects of the Bill. I should like to quote part of the explanation:

> "The costs to the Government of the arrangements envisaged will depend on the level of terrorist damage suffered by properties covered by the arrangement, and therefore no precise estimate is possible."

That arises from the peculiar circumstances of the measure, and I do not want to argue against it in any way. Essentially, what we are dealing with is an IRA bombing campaign in this country. However, the Bill is general and will apply to any type of terrorist activity. Clause 2(2), in defining an act of terrorism, does not refer simply to acts intended to overthrow Her Majesty's Government or to influence them by force or violence. Other Governments are included. I am thinking of the embassies of other countries, whether the Governments of those countries are de jure or de facto. Presumably, if an attack were made on the mission of Eritrea—a country that has not yet been formally recognised but is likely to be recognised on 24 May—it could be dealt with as would be an attack on a subsequent embassy. We are dealing with a general legal situation, although it has its origins in IRA activity.

Businesses can take certain action to contain the cost and lessen the impact of terrorism. In this regard, they ought to direct their attention to the moral, political and financial support that can be given to organisations—many of them in Northern Ireland—that try bravely to face up to terrorist activity, whether of the IRA or of Protestant paramilitary organisations such as the UDA. It should be recognised that there are people who seek to undermine bodies such as the IRA and to remove the

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conditions in which they can develop. This is a matter to which commercial interests would do well to pay some attention.

The Peace Train organisation was formed as a result of the disruption of rail services, especially between Dublin and Belfast. The purpose of disruption is to have traffic moved from the railway to other types of transport that are susceptible to rackets. In addition, the British troops who have to clear railway lines that have been tampered with are vulnerable. Although there has recently been some similar IRA activity, the Peace Train organisation has been quite successful. Following deaths at railway stations and explosions on railway lines in this country, the Peace Train people organised a run from Belfast, through Dublin, Dun Laoghaire and Holyhead to Euston. People from 17 political parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and Britain were involved, and the President of the Republic, Mary Robinson, gave her support.

It is important that businesses should support such activities. Obviously, many people who have no party political connections are involved. I refer in particular to a group called Families Against Intimidation and Terror. In Northern Ireland, the IRA and the UDA try to operate no-go areas in which they take charge of law and order. When there is lawlessness in an area, such people try to move in and take over from the proper authorities. Knee-capping is one manifestation. The IRA shoots up Catholics, and Protestant paramilitary organisations shoot up Protestants.

It is good to have an organisation in which Protestants and Catholics unite against such activities. A very impressive meeting, involving three Protestants and two Catholics from Ireland, took place in this building. The common experience of those people obviously affects businesses in Northern Ireland. These are moves with which we ought to be associated. There are many community organisations and bodies such as the Irish Association, Co-operation North, Glencree, Women Together, Lurgan Interfriendship, the Peace People—and Peace '93 which emerged after the Warrington bombing and held a massive rally in Dublin. Business needs to be aware of those organisations because they could have an impact on how the legislation operates.

I am associated with one such group, New Consensus, which operates in Ireland and in Northern Ireland; there is also a group in Britain. I am privileged to be one of its presidents, together with the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and Lord Hylton, who is a Cross-Bencher. I hope that that shows what needs to happen here and in Northern Ireland on a cross-party, cross-community basis. The people whose names appear on the letterhead of that organisation are from different parties, as are the vice-presidents—my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). Not only do the presidents and vice-presidents represent different parties but my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles and I represent different wings of the same party. Such activity should be encouraged——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman's remarks should relate to the Bill.

Mr. Barnes: I am grateful that you have been so generous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the points that I have made so far. I think that they were relevant to the measure because of the expenditure that the Government may be involved in due to acts of terrorism. What is needed is action that begins to undermine the development and the growth of terrorism. There are things which business can do to assist that. That was the logic of the points that I was making.

The debate has been fascinating. Quite often, hon. Members make similar speeches and have party briefs to speak to. Usually, different parties argue different positions. So far, the contributions to the debate have represented different interests. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made a telling contribution. If we were debating the politics of Northern Ireland, hon. Members might have different views on the way forward and on how to undermine the activities of terrorists, but hon. Members are united on the Bill.

7.33 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I wish first to make two apologies and to pay one tribute. My first apology is to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) for missing his speech. I heard the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, but I had to leave the Chamber to pay a tribute to Robert Adley and did not hear the speech of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough.

My second apology is not to anyone in the House. When one of my constituents, Stephen Lawrence, was murdered recently, I would have liked to have had the chance to raise in the House the unprovoked racial attack which resulted in the murder of a fine young man who was black. There may be another occasion when I can do that, but I wish to say to his family that issues relating to terrorism are no more important than the incident which caused them such suffering.

My tribute is to my hon. Friend the Minister. There has been a general welcome for the Bill, in which I join. I also pay tribute to the way in which my hon. Friend introduced it. He did not give way to the temptations which were obviously present. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was right that avoiding exaggerated reaction to the aims of terrorists helps reduce what they achieve.

People who set off bombs and who carry out assassinations, whether they have picked out targets or are casual about whom they kill, seek publicity and public reaction. That public reaction may include what insurers feel that they may or may not be able to afford to provide cover for. The public reaction may include what the Government decide that they should properly do. Certainly, it includes what the Provisional IRA was trying to achieve in the mid-1970s and failed to do in the mid-1990s, which was to drive a wedge between the Irish and British communities.

It is becoming ever clearer that there is no wedge between the Irish and the British. The Warrington bomb helped to focus attention on a development over the past 10 years: that more and more Irish people are saying openly, "This is not done in our name." That is a very important thing for the Irish to say. It is important for those of us who are in part Irish, or in large part not Irish, to be able to stand with the people in the Irish community

in Dublin, Belfast and London and say that we understand what the terrorists, the bombers and the killers are trying to achieve.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made an impressive speech. His points could not properly be answered by one Minister. The Minister who will reply to the debate can only say that some of those points do not concern the departmental interest which he covers.

I do not believe that the Bill should be amended to cover the point, but when we think of all the interests involved—the insurance interest, the City interest and the national interest—if we cannot enable the two heroic minicab drivers to carry on with their trade, by providing insurance cover and vehicles, we are not the sort of country that I believe we are.

Perhaps someone in the City of London corporation could find out whether, by passing round a hat or by applying to an existing fund, the minicab drivers could be put at least in the position that they were in before they were commissioned to take bombs to Downing street and elsewhere. When awards are being made for valour or gallantry, I think that most people would regard it as appropriate that they should receive such public recognition.

As to the points made by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), it is important to reduce the costs of insurance, reinsurance and guarantees to Pool Reinsurance. There are different ways of doing that. Some, which are for another debate, are hard security measures. We do not want to turn the City of London, the city of Westminster or any other part of the United Kingdom into a no-go area because that is not what a free and open society is about. Part of the solution is to continue showing in various ways that the terrorists—this applies to disloyalists just as much as to the Provisional IRA—are not achieving what they are after. If we can understand some of the underlying grievances, and say so out loud, they will be less able to exploit them in recruiting people to their illegal criminal substitute for politics.

We must also recognise that bombs are set off and people are murdered to get publicity and public reaction. We must turn that against the terrorists. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East made a passing reference to the Peace Train. When I was a Minister in Northern Ireland, I was responsible for railways. I leave with the House one experience. On most days, the rail service was interrupted by bombs, hoax bombs, calls and hoax calls. The IRA was trying to get the same publicity as that which followed a tragic level-crossing crash at Slaght outside Ballymena, which was not terrorist-related. The IRA knew that it was not possible, either in the City of London or on a railway line in Northern Ireland, for the security forces and the railways to be able to react almost perfectly to every incident. Therefore, it tried to cause the sorts of deaths and crashes that we saw outside Ballymena. For six weeks after that, there was no interruption to the railway service.

It is possible to turn the publicity and public reaction against the IRA. I hope that one memorial to Edward Henty will be a newspaper drive for understanding of what people want when they have the sort of explosions with which the Bill is partly designed to cope.

Without straying too far from the Bill, it is worth saying that, in my experience of working across the denominations in central America and South Africa, every group that would otherwise have turned to using bombs if they wanted to make a point, either in their own country or perhaps in London—I should say in passing that we still do not know who caused the bomb in New York; it could have been an IRA-related bomb or one linked to Yugoslavia——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is stretching it now. The Chair was patient with and understanding of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), but allusions to New York and South Africa go way beyond the scope of the Bill. The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) should either come back to the Bill or draw his remarks to a conclusion.

Mr. Bottomley: I anticipated guidance from the Chair because I was about to say that, if we want people to understand why we need to control the public expenditure costs related to the Bill—I would not anticipate guidance that that was out of order—we need to understand that it is not done simply by a reinsurance pool. Establishing the pool or providing a guarantee if the pool is exhausted leads to increased public expenditure which it is the primary duty of the 651 hon. Members in the House, whether they are below the Gangway or occupy the Speaker's Chair, to reduce.

Reference has been made to the need to deliver public order—we were reminded of that by the hon. Member for Upper Bann and other hon. Members. The point is that other people have given up violence when they have the opportunity to vote. In the House, we have the opportunity of debate as well.

Those who are concerned about reducing their insurance premium—that is, for insurance up to £100,000—and those who will pay extra to the pool should accept the invitation to consider other ways of reducing the background to the events against which they are protecting themselves and against which the House and the Government are trying to protect them. That does not simply mean understanding why it is wrong for people to let off bombs and bullets and why it is important to understand the words of the seven-year-old to her parents after the Baltic Exchange bomb, "Why are they trying to hurt me?" Such a question can draw a response from those around the disloyalists and the Provisional IRA. Effectively, the cross on which that girl is put becomes as important and as powerful as the cross on a ballot paper. In the end, those two forms of the cross will outfight the bombers and those using guns to intimidate or kill others.

I suspect that if people in the city—I do not mean simply the city of London, because the cities of Westminster, Warrington, Manchester, Leicester and so on are also important—understand that they can provide support to non-governmental organisations, which may be by small amounts of money but mainly by a degree of interest, we shall find that in the United Kingdom, as in other countries around the world, the terrorists will understand that they will not be successful with their present methods.

There are ways to increase understanding, but I recommend that people should not simply listen to this debate. When a book called "May the Lord in his Mercy be Kind to Belfast" by Tony Parker is published next week, people will get a greater understanding and be able to share in such debates inside the Chamber and outside.

7.44 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): To follow the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley)—without testing your patience or tolerance, Mr. Deputy Speaker—they were talking about a reinsurance policy. It was not necessarily the reinsurance policy in the Bill, but, nevertheless, an important reinsurance policy for future peace in these islands.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East because earlier this week I followed him when we were talking about ending violence in another part of the world—in Africa—and seeing how the pieces can be picked up after a 30-year war and contributions made towards that. In this debate, we are talking about a similar period of violence and destruction and how we can help to ensure that the pieces are picked up.

This measure will not defeat terrorism, but it will help to ensure that the objectives of terrorism are not achieved. Terrorism has many forms, but the terrorism that we see, especially in this island, is aimed at a number of objectives. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham paid tribute to constituents of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), and we all share that. The spirit to which he referred is a British spirit, although it incorporates someone who came to the United Kingdom from Ethiopia. That spirit is the reason why the aim of killing and maiming cannot succeed.

In my constituency, I have had attempts to disrupt services—two bombs were placed on railway lines outside Clapham Junction. Neither of those attempts succeeded because the people who run and organise the services got going again. Within half an hour of my being on those sites, the trains were running and people were getting back to work. That is the way in which we prevent the objectives from being achieved.

Another objective is that of causing as much economic damage to the United Kingdom as the terrorists can manage. The Bill will ensure that the objective is not achieved. The economic damage may be damage to business premises or shops and jobs. It may be damage that is done to the financial base that underwrites the United Kingdom economy—in particular, the insurance industry. Attached to all that was the attempt to destroy a church in the City and the reaction and response to that. None of the objectives will be achieved.

This Bill, which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State introduced after some of the most able deliberations and consultations with the people most affected and the experts in the field that we have ever had, will go a long way to provide the collective response that we need to ensure that the terrorist objective fails. The measure is right and is welcome. It is right because it is the safety net—it plugs the loopholes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said, the costs will be monitored and regular reports will be made. Reference was made to the fact that we must ensure that fraud is not allowed to creep into the system.

We must stress that the measure is based on the principle that it will in no way assist the uninsured. People may have the impression that we have introduced a measure which will mean that they will not need to bother in the future—the Government will pick up the tab. The hon. Member for Tottenham should tell the minicab driver in his constituency that the Government have not done anything in the measure to discourage him from taking out full comprehensive insurance in the future. I believe that that driver suggested that such insurance might cost £2,000 for a £1,500 car. He should shop around: the only justification for such a premium would be a very bad record and, no doubt, no one with such a record would be driving a minicab. The hon. Gentleman's constituent can be reassured that affordable insurance is available; however, I take the point about compensation for any threat to his livelihood.

It is important not to distort the market and I believe that the Bill goes to great lengths to ensure that that will not happen. It provides a safety net, rather than competition with existing insurance facilities. Some legislation presents us with a temptation to step in, but this Bill does not: although it commits us to ensuring that the risk is underwritten, it will encourage neither high costs nor inefficiency in the system.

The Bill also requires everyone in the community, especially those running businesses, to take sensible precautions against terrorism. Firms in my constituency have expressed concern about structures that could be at risk—gas holders, for instance. We must ensure that such risks are tackled by the managers of the establishments concerned. A home owner does not simply rely on his insurance company to protect him once his home has been burgled; he must also rely on his initiative to make such damage less likely. It is crucial to take such precautions, with police advice.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will clarify three points. When I intervened on the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) on the subject of looting, he responded fairly up to a point; that point involved the protection of an establishment by a security service or firm. Will the payment of insurance following a terrorist act be dependent on such protection, or will the protection be the norm in any event, regardless of whether an act of terrorism has taken place?

My second point concerns the definition of "terrorist", which lawyers doubtless have at their fingertips. Terrorism in London has not always been connected with such bodies as the IRA; London has experienced other forms of anarchistic, violent vandalism. At what point does such action become terrorism and qualify under the Bill?

Thirdly, how will Lloyd's fit in? The way in which companies and their reinsurance companies will join the Pool Reinsurance Company is fairly straightforward, but I am not sure how Lloyd's will do so without undermining the unlimited liability criteria on which it has been judged in the past. Agreement may have been reached and Lloyd's may have taken account of this in its plans for the future; none the less, I believe that the issue should be clarified.

We should pay tribute not only to the Government, but to the British insurance industry. It has taken some knocks; risks have gone wrong and it has had bad publicity from time to time. Ultimately, however, when something goes wrong in our households, businesses or jobs, it is to Lloyd's that we turn and it rarely lets us down. The Bill will ensure that it will not let us down in the event of terrorist acts of violence and vandalism.

7.54 pm

Mr. Bell: With the leave of the House, I should like to wind up briefly on behalf of the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) had the benefit of my legal advice earlier. I am happy to say that it was covered by privilege, being given on the Floor of the House, so I am not liable if it turns out to be wrong. I shall, however, leave it to the Minister to give his definition of terrorism as he sees it, and to define the participation of Lloyd's. It would be interesting to know how it can participate, given its syndicate system.

We enjoyed the eloquent speech of the right hon. Member of Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) about the role of the City of London police. We sometimes forget that they are separate from the rest of our police force. They have played a strong and significant role in the face of difficult and serious circumstances.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) demonstrated the unanimity of the House. When the hon. Member for Battersea congratulated the Government, I thought that he would also congratulate the Opposition not only on supporting the Government fully, but on making clear their support beforehand so that hon. Members unable to be present could leave earlier. The hon. Member for Gordon spoke of the Government as the reinsurer of last resort, and of the capital base behind them. It is, of course, money in the bank for anyone whose claim ends up on the desk of the Pool Reinsurance Company and could not be met in any other way.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who declared his interest at an early stage, made an interesting point. He said that he thought that there should be mutual cover for mutual risk, leading to mutual insurance. That was a valid point, which again demonstrated the significant role that insurance can play in the community and the need for all of us to pull together.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) based his speech on personal experience in Northern Ireland. He referred to what one might describe as the excessive publicity which follows terrorist acts. Having examined the press coverage of such events in preparation for the debate, I feel sure that there is excessive publicity. I am reminded of the sinking of an oil tanker off the Shetlands. The television reporter asked someone on the spot, "What is the worst that can happen now?" I think that we spend too much time considering the worst that can happen, rather than the best. Given the means available to the state as the reinsurer of last resort and the flexibility of the insurance market, it is clear that we can respond to the crisis in the market and ensure that businesses continue.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) showed the Opposition a ray of light when he said that it was appropriate to intervene in markets when they failed. Opposition Members will remember that in times to come: every time we call for intervention, we can justify it on the basis of market failure. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made a first-class constituency speech, showing the kind of speech that hon. Members can make on the Floor of the House when they are not inhibited by the Whips and are free to speak on behalf of their constituents. The Whips look up in surprise, but one of the great attributes of today's debate has been the absence of any contribution from them other than benign nodding and an occasional glance at the clock.

By drawing national attention to the plight of his two constituents, my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham rendered a significant service not only to them but to the debate and to the standing of the House of Commons. We were also grateful for the contribution of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who spoke both as a former Northern Ireland Minister and a Lloyd's name. He brought some extremely helpful knowledge to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes)—who has devoted a good deal of his parliamentary time to the group known as New Consensus—introduced an extra dimension in relation to what can and what should happen, and spoke of the possible role of Northern Ireland in making Bills such as this unnecessary in future.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made an interesting speech. He, too, is a former Northern Ireland spokesman. He mentioned Mr. Robert Adley. I must tell the House that when I heard of Mr. Adley's death this morning I put on this tie in his honour. He and I shared an interest in ties with the hon. Member for Gosport and other hon. Members, and I think that his wife Jane would be gratified to know that on the day of his death reference has been made to him in the Chamber.

Mr. Viggers: We do not often have an opportunity to pay tribute to an hon. Friend, but I should like to add to the comments made by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). It was courteous of him to refer to our late colleague Robert Adley, who was held in great affection in the House.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those remarks.

I think that I have covered the issues raised, and I have one or two points to put to the Minister. It has been stated that the legislation is retrospective. The question is whether the Bill is genuinely retrospective. I am satisfied that it is, and that when enacted it will be retrospective. The Minister may wish to clarify that. There is consensus in the House on the measure.

8 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate. I congratulate all hon. Members who have participated—our proceedings have revealed a remarkable and rare unanimity among us.

In the debate, I have been accused of introducing interventionism. It just goes to show what a wet left-winger like myself, when introduced to the Department of Trade and Industry, can do to effect changes in Government policy. As I said in my opening speech, such interventionism is designed to correct a market failure where the national interest requires it.

I have never been an anarchist who does not believe in any Government intervention. I have always believed that the national interest should be safeguarded by the Government, but I have taken a different view of the national interest from that of, for example, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). It is a sign of the unanimity in the House that the hon. Gentleman, from one wing of the Labour party, and myself, from the opposite extreme of the political spectrum in the Conservative party, were able to unite in support of the Bill.

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

I accept the correction of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), for whom I have the highest respect, when he referred to my mention of the infinitesimal chances of the IRA or any terrorist group succeeding in compelling the British Government to change policy as a result of acts of violence. He said that the correct word should be "non-existent", and I certainly accept his correction, although "infinitesimal" means so small as not to be perceived.

I certainly agree that we in this country can never allow Government policy to be dictated by acts of violence. We may have to respond to acts of violence with measures such as the Bill, but the achievement of the political objectives that inspire the violence will never be conceded by Her Majesty's Government, whatever their political complexion. To do so would be to subvert the basis of democratic society and institutions of democracy such as the House.

We should allow ourselves some general reflections on the Bill's purpose. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) was right to say that we should all become more vigilant. There have been some recent terrorist apprehensions by the police. I certainly agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) that the City police, the Westminster police and the Metropolitan police deserve the highest praise for the way in which they handled the consequences of the bombs in the City and elsewhere in the capital.

As a consequence of increased public vigilance, we have been able to apprehend terrorist suspects, and we hope that those responsible for all the acts of violence will be apprehended. Through our vigilance, we can all participate in the national interest.

My constituency borders the borough of Warrington. Bronwen Vickers, whose leg had to be amputated as a result of the explosion in Warrington, is one of my constituents. The effects of terrorist violence have been felt in the north-west of England, which is close to home for me. It must be the united desire of everyone in the House to remain vigilant and to help to defeat the current terrorist outbreak that is causing so much hurt.

I agree with the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who paid me a surprising compliment by commenting on the moderation that I have displayed during the debate: we would play into the hands of terrorists if we exaggerated the consequences of violence. I believe, and always have done, that the best response is to be resigned but determined.

We must be determined not to be deflected from our political objectives and to say, "Try as you might, and although it may hurt us or cost us money, we shall then bear the cost that you impose on us and redouble our efforts to preserve the essence of our democratic system free from the taint of violence." We shall respond by the counter-measures that we take—not only by policing, but by introducing measures such as the Bill—in order to neutralise, and more than neutralise, the effects of the violence used in an attempt to defeat the democratic process.

I have been asked a number of technical questions, and I shall try to respond to as many as possible. I know that there is considerable interest in the next debate, so I shall not delay the House too long. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) mentioned the Bill's retrospective application. The Bill is drafted to apply to contracts of insurance entered into from 1 January. That date does not appear in the Bill, but that general power is contained in the Bill, and it has been made plain during the debate that it will apply to contracts of insurance from 1 January.

The sums of money that the Government ultimately may have to be paid will be identified in a separate vote within the Department of Trade and Industry's votes. Any accruals that may fall due will appear in the appropriation accounts. There will be opportunities in Parliament during the year to debate the way in which the scheme has worked. There will doubtless be other general debates as well.

I cannot commit the Leader of the House or the business managers, as I am now inhibited and no longer an inhibitor as a member of the Whips Office. Therefore, I cannot say to what extent we shall be able to debate matters related to the Bill once it is enacted, as I hope it will be. I am sure that there will be many opportunities for us to discuss the Bill's general principles and the way in which it has worked in practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield also asked about the costs of the recent explosion at Bishopsgate. I return to the remarks of the hon. Member for Upper Bann, who deplored the knee-jerk reactions, scaremongering and exaggerations of the instant pundits that were so gleefully reported by the press. I think that people, particularly those who work in the City of London and the insurance industry, should know better than to respond with the comments that we heard in the immediate aftermath of the explosions, both at St. Mary Axe and at Bishopsgate.

As was proved in the case of St. Mary Axe, the pundits were talking through their hats and did nothing but damage to the cause we are debating. They gave nothing but help to the IRA by their intemperate and ignorant comments. If there is another explosion, I hope that the instant pundits will curb their desire for a brief moment of publicity and say nothing until they know what they are talking about.

As for the cost of the Bishopsgate explosion, I am not in a position to give an accurate figure, because too many uncertainties still surround it. It is not yet certain how much work has to be done on some of the buildings, so we do not know how much the work will cost. We do not know how much of the damage was insured against terrorist risk. Some insurance policies hang over from last year and include terrorist cover. They will not expire until later this year. So many buildings that may have suffered as a result of the attack may already be covered by contracts of insurance. We therefore will not know the total cost for many months.

It is not yet certain how much of what has been insured will fall within the current arrangements, so we do not know to what extent Pool Reinsurance will be called on to pay out. Finally, it is not yet certain how high the income of Pool will be this year, so we cannot at this stage predict what calls on the Government there may be.

Although this may not be regarded as an informative response, it at least has the merit of accuracy—unlike some of the specific figures given by people for previous

explosions, figures that were subsequently found to be utterly misleading. It would be wrong to adopt that approach.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), in an excellent speech on behalf of his constituents, drew attention to the bravery of certain drivers and to their speed of thought. I share the regret expressed by other hon. Members about their loss, but I reiterate that the scheme is an insurance scheme. I cannot guarantee a solution to the sort of problem that the hon. Gentleman discussed. It depends on the degree of take-up as a result of the operation of the scheme.

I welcome other measures that are being taken, especially the establishment of a trust fund, from which I hope the losses sustained by public-spirited individuals such as the constituents of the hon. Member for Tottenham will be paid. I hope that people will contribute generously.

I have asked the insurance industry to ensure that third party, fire and theft policies always cover loss due to terrorism and explosions of this kind. There is no reason why such cover should be excluded; after all, the reason why we are debating the Bill is that, in the past, insurance companies did not consider the liability to which they might be exposed from terrorist explosions, because they were not a problem of which we had any great experience.

I fully accept the point made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann in support of the hon. Member for Tottenham—that there is a lacuna here; but it is not best plugged by Government compensation. The arrangement for Great Britain will be sufficient for our needs. The situation here is rather different from that in Northern Ireland, and we do not necessarily need a comprehensive scheme crafted in the same way to cover the whole country.

Unless I can be persuaded by some compelling argument to extend the scheme from Northern Ireland to Great Britain—no one has succeeded in persuading me yet, not even the eloquent hon. Member for Upper Bann —we will not adopt the scheme for Northern Ireland here. I cannot speak for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The attractions or otherwise of what I am introducing for Great Britain to the Northern Ireland Office and to Northern Ireland are a matter to take up with him. I am sure that the hon. Member for Upper Bann will receive the usual convincing response from my right hon. and learned Friend.

I will be happy to respond by letter to points that I have not been able to deal with this evening. I refer particularly to the small but important points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). Meanwhile, I hope that the spirit of amity in which this matter has been debated this evening will survive. If we ever suffer a repetition of the appalling terrorist incidents of recent times, I hope that they will serve not to divide us, but to strengthen the unity that has been so amply demonstrated this evening.

I thank all hon. Members who have taken part, especially the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, who speaks with such authority for the Labour party on these matters. I thank hon. Members for assisting the quick passage of the Bill through the House, because people outside expect the Government to respond quickly in emergencies such as this.

I believe that the combination of swift action and measured response which this Bill represents is legislation and Government action at its best. Government action with the support of both sides of the House is all too rarely found in our political system or, indeed, in political systems anywhere in the world. That is to the credit of all, and it should be a further demonstration to the IRA that its cause will never win.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills), That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Further proceedings on the Bill stood postponed, pursuant to Order [7 May.]

REINSURANCE (ACTS OF TERRORISM) BILL

[Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of such sums as may be necessary to enable the Secretary of State to meet such obligations of his as are mentioned in the Act;

(b) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

8.16 pm

Mr. Bell: The Bill comes before the House as a result of the shortage of capacity in the worldwide reinsurance market and because of the fact that certain European reinsurance companies withdrew their support from our insurance market. It is therefore less to do with terrorism than with insurance.

Under clause 1, the power of the state comes in behind the insurance market and stands four square behind the market of the City of London. We welcome that.

Under clause 2, the Treasury will undertake any liability that may flow from the Bill. We welcome the involvement of the Treasury. We see that a mutual company is to be created, and we welcome that idea and urge all reinsurance companies in the country fully to involve themselves.

We see that the DTI will have certain responsibilities —two posts will be required. We know that the Department is responsible for oversight of our insurance market, so we welcome that aspect of the Bill too.

We commend the Third Reading of the Bill——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Perhaps I should let the hon. Gentleman know that we are discussing the money resolution, not Third Reading—although they may be virtually indistinguishable.

Mr. Bell: Since they are virtually indistinguishable, I shall leave my comments at that.

Question put and agreed to.

The House, pursuant to Order [7 May], immediately resolved itself into a Committee on the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Mr. Bell: Having ensured that the money resolution and Third Reading are not mutually exclusive in lawyers' terms, I shall not repeat my earlier remarks. I shall say

[Mr. Bell]

only that the final message from the Opposition, which is similar to that from the Government, is that there is no future in terrorism, destruction and death. No political solutions are on offer. The message to the IRA, or any other terrorist organisation, is that it is not worth it—it is not worth a bean. I hope that that message comes over clearly.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Automated Credit Transfers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert. G. Hughes.]*

8.20 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I am grateful that Madam Speaker has chosen this subject for debate, because her choice recognises the social and economic importance of the effect of automated credit transfer upon rural sub-post offices nationwide. There have been six early-day motions on the subject over the past few months, attracting at least 200 signatures at the last count. It has been the subject of written and oral questions, including two in Prime Minister's Question Time, and a debate in the other place. There will be a debate on the subject, in Opposition time, next week.

Despite all the attention, the issue has not been resolved, nor have key aspects of it been made clearer. The issue is important, first and foremost, for the impact that it could have on the millions of pensioners who use their post office on a weekly basis to cash their pensions and benefits. For most pensioners, that weekly visit to the post office is the most convenient and desirable way to receive their benefits. It has many merits for them. It gives them an opportunity to catch up on news and gossip, and to find out what is happening in the local community and to friends and neighbours.

That visit is also an opportunity to gather from the postmasters and postmistresses other information that may be useful and beneficial to them. The individuals who work behind the counters are, as most hon. Members—certainly all who represent rural constituencies—will recognise, people who are made enormously knowledgeable by the very nature of their work, combining as they do the functions of Government clerk, small shopkeeper and occasional social worker.

Perhaps I may be permitted to quote a postmistress in my local village of Garrabost, Mrs. Joan Anne Campbell. Speaking to the local newspaper, the *Stornoway Gazette*, Mrs. Campbell said:

> "Your local post office is more than just that—it is a public service. It is a place to get forms filled in, a place to meet and have a chat and, sometimes for those behind the counter, it's almost like being a social worker. A local sub-post officer is really the centre-point of a community and has a very important part to play."

That may have been said by someone working in a local post office in the Western Isles, but it will be recognised as valid and true throughout the rural areas of Britain.

Unlike banks, sub-post offices are easily accessible to the vast majority of elderly people who use them. As is not the case with banks, there are sub-post offices in the majority of villages throughout Great Britain. I have been quoted the figure of 60 per cent. of villages having a sub-post office. Those who run post offices are familiar with, and familiar to, their elderly customers. They provide a point of reassurance for the pensioners who use them. The Government should see them as an invaluable asset, rather than as an encumbrance or a drain on money that they have to stop.

The non-appearance one week of a pensioner who usually uses the post office will immediately be noticed by the local sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress. If a pensioner appears but looks a bit peaky, that will be noticed and observed. That kind of contact, that kind of

relationship between people, is unique to the post office network of Great Britain. It could not be duplicated by the banking service.

The system is not an archaic hangover, a traditional aspect of British national life that is best done away with. On the contrary, with the advent of care in the community, the social role of sub-post offices as dispensers of advice and services, as well as of pensions and benefits, ought to be enhanced, not diminished. If they had not had that network of 20,000 post offices and sub-post offices, the Government would have had to invent it when they came to implement care in the community.

It is a foolish economy for the Government to be considering closing rural sub-post offices, whatever the purported savings of a switch to automated credit transfer. What savings there will be may be at the financial expense of the pensioners, because of the charges that may be deducted by the banks or the loss of interest on delayed payments, which may be retained by the Government.

If the move goes ahead, it will be greatly to the detriment of pensioners, who will be much inconvenienced. The switch to ACT will mean that pensioners will lose the right to receive their pensions on a weekly basis. Payments will be made monthly in arrears. That may be convenient and financially attractive for the Government, but I cannot for a moment believe that it will be convenient for the pensioners. Many pensioners—perhaps even a majority of them—are relatively well off, but many live a hand-to-mouth existence. For them, it is impossible to conceive of budgeting other than on a weekly basis. It would make their lives still more difficult to have to be constantly a month in arrears because of the switch to ACT.

Pensioners also need to have cash ready to hand to buy the little odds and ends that they need on a day-to-day basis—groceries, newspapers and so on. Where can they obtain that ready cash if the Government go ahead and succeed in switching benefits to direct payments into banks? Pensioners will often have to cope with the fact that there will be no bank in their locality, and they will have to travel many miles to go into town to withdraw money for the week or the fortnight, on buses or even by hiring a taxi if the bus network is not there or the service is not convenient. That will be enormously inconvenient and troubling to many pensioners.

We must also bear in mind the fact that pensioners will have to visit the bank in person to draw money, whereas someone who is elderly, who is ill that week, or who is partially sighted or disabled, can send a representative to the local post office to pick up his or her pension. With banks that is not possible.

I have already mentioned the invaluable social role of the rural post office, and there is no doubt that the sub-post office network will be badly hit by the loss of the business that pensions and benefits represent. Inevitably, many will close as a direct consequence of the switch to the payment of pensions and benefits by automated transfer into bank accounts. Almost 13 million people visit their local post office each week to pick up their pensions, and that business from the Department of Social Security represents one third of the turnover of Post Office Counters Ltd. That is a greater proportion of business than comes from the Royal Mail, which represents only one fifth of the total turnover. Of that enormous benefits turnover, about 18 per cent. is drawn through sub-post offices.

Clearly the loss of the pensions and benefits business will have a direct impact on the viability of local sub-post offices. Moreover, the loss of that business will cause the loss of other business, on which sub-post offices rely to make them financially viable. We must remember that post offices are often shops as well, and that the people who come in to pick up their pensions also stop to buy newspapers, groceries, stationery and a variety of other goods.

If those people did not come in to pick up their pensions and benefits, they would not buy the groceries and newspapers either, and the loss of that secondary business would be a massive blow to rural sub-post offices. If offices had to close because the loss of that business meant that they were no longer viable, many villages would lose not only their post office but their only shop. That would be a severe blow to many villages.

The Government talk about offering their customers choice. However, if local sub-post offices close many people who would have wished to exercise that choice will be denied the opportunity to do so. They will be forced against their will to use automated credit transfer. The Government must take on board the fact that the exercise of choice by a minority, by making the sub-post office network no longer viable, could have a knock-on effect on the majority of people and in effect remove the choice that they would have exercised if the post offices in their communities had still been open.

There is another point to make about consumer choice. If the Government were merely offering information to pensioners about the existence of automated credit transfer, there would be little objection from either side of the House. The Government already provide the option of automated credit transfer, and there can be little objection to making that option widely known to pensioners and to others who might want to choose it, so long as the choice is offered in a neutral and even-handed way. But clearly, that is not happening.

Both the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), have made it clear that the Government are actively encouraging pensioners to switch to automated credit transfer. On 12 March this year, the Under-Secretary said:

"Our policy is to encourage the use of automated credit transfer".—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. *751*.]

In other words, the Government are not neutral or even-handed; they are peddling a particular option for their own self-interested reasons.

That fact is borne out by a trial of three new forms being sent to 24,000 people who are due to receive their pensions for the first time. The forms are designed to tell the pensioners what pension they are entitled to and how they may collect it. I have obtained copies of the forms, and each one of the three types is being sent out to a sample of 8,000 new pensioners. The first form is the most even-handed, because there is a section, part 9, headed:

"How you want to be paid—you can choose".

That is fair enough. The form lists two options, the first of which is:

"Straight into a bank account or building society account".

Then various details are given about that option.

The second option is described as:

"By order book—at a post office".

Slightly fewer details are then given about that option. Later in the form, there are two sections for pensioners to

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

fill in, one of which will provide for payment of the pension straight into a bank or building society account, and the other of which will provide payment by order book at a post office. The pensioner can choose simply by filling in the form and sending it off.

That form provides the pensioner with a clear choice, although there could be objections about the way in which the two choices are described, because the first choice—payment straight into a bank or building society account—is accompanied by a list of its advantages, such as the fact that interest can be gathered on the money paid into such accounts. We might think that it was a bit disingenuous of the Government not to mention that they will be gathering interest from the money that they pay out, not weekly, but monthly in arrears. But we can leave that point to one side.

We might also complain that the option of the order book is described, but does not have any corresponding list of advantages appended. Nevertheless, there is enough information there for the pensioner to make a fairly clear, well-informed choice between the two options.

The second form, however, falls well short of offering the pensioner a clear choice between the two options that are available. In the equivalent part 9 of that form it says again,

"How do you want to be paid? You can choose."

However, it does not give two options. It starts by listing

"Straight into a bank account or a building society account."

Then it gives the same list of advantages and procedures.

At the bottom of the form it says simply:

"If you want any more information, get in touch with your Social Security office."

There is no mention whatsoever of the post office option.

Also at the bottom of the form there is provision for a form to be filled in by the pensioner in order to get the pension paid straight into a bank or building society account. It then, finally, mentions payment by order book at a post office and asks the question:

"Do you want to be paid by order book at a post office?"

It does not mention any advantages or give any details. There are simply two boxes, one to be ticked for "no" and one to be ticked for "yes", and it says:

"We will write to you about this."

So hardly any information is made available to the pensioner. The pensioner has to tick a box and send the form off, and the DSS will send the pensioner further information about the post office option.

That form is bad enough, but the third form that is being tested with 8,000 pensioners is even worse. It is similar to the other forms. It has a section headed:

"How you want to be paid",

and, as in the second form, the option of having the pension paid straight into a bank or building society account is described in great detail. All the supposed advantages are listed, but again there is no mention of the post office option. It simply says at the bottom of the form that if the pensioner wants any more information he or she should get in touch with the social security office.

At the bottom of the coupon that has to be filled in by the pensioner in order to take advantage of the option of having the pension paid straight into a bank or building society account there are the words:

"Do you want to be paid by other means?"

It does not say whether those other means are through the post office or any other way. There are again two boxes, one to be ticked for "no" and the other for "yes", followed by the words:

"We will write to you about this."

So the first of these forms points out the advantages of using automated transfer and describes to some extent the option of using a post office. The second form gives information only about banks and building societies; it mentions post offices, but gives no information whatsoever about that option. The third form does not even mention the fact that there is a post office option; it simply says that there are other options available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Henley, made what I regard as a pretty astounding and breathtaking statement about these forms in the other place. He said:

"The simple aim behind what we are doing is to test the effect of each of those forms."—[*Official Report*, House of Lords, 17 March 1993; Vol. 543, c. 1544.]

It would not take an Einstein to figure out the effect of these forms. Obviously, the more automated transfer is talked of, and the less the post office is mentioned, the more the pensioners will opt for the former. That will clearly be the effect of these three forms.

This is really a dodgy way to go about informing pensioners of their rights and options in receiving their pensions. Surely the Government should be trying to make their forms for pensioners more, rather than less, helpful.

I expect that the Minister is a fervent exponent of the citizens charter, and I ask him how it is consistent with that charter deliberately to withhold information from pensioners, DSS customers, as the last two forms do. I believe that the Government have no right to be steering and manipulating pensioners in this way. They should be offering genuine choice to pensioners, not a fake version of it.

I am looking for two things from the Minister, on behalf of the Government, when he replies. The first is a retraction of the Government's statement that it is their intention to encourage pensioners to use automated transfer. I want the Minister to be able to say on behalf of the Government that pensioners will be given genuine freedom of choice in this matter, without constraint or manipulation of any kind. The second is to ask his colleagues in the DSS to give a commitment that these trial forms will be shredded and thrown away, and new ones produced—forms that will provide proper comprehensive, unbiased information for pensioners.

The 20,000 post offices and sub-post offices of Britain are not just local centres of community life; they are also, I believe, a manifestation and a symbol in each town and village of Britain, whether in the Western Isles or Tunbridge Wells, of the wider national community, the country to which we all belong. A genuinely Conservative Government would have as one of its foremost priorities the preservation and enhancement of these symbols, these centres, of our national life.

But this Administration is not, of course, Conservative in that traditional and worthy sense. This is an Administration of libertarian dogmatists and cheeseparing accountants, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. I fear that rural post offices are intended to be the latest in the long roll call of their victims.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before we continue, I remind hon. Members that an Adjournment

debate normally lasts only half an hour. It is understood that only the hon. Member raising the subject and the Minister may speak unless both grant their permission to other hon. Members. I know that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has allowed one hon. Member to come into the debate. I am sure that neither he nor the Minister will mind if others come in. Nevertheless, I believe that we should maintain the tradition.

8.49 pm

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): I thank and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on choosing this subject for the Adjournment debate. Before the general election, there was much talk about a double whammy. I do not know whether the wording of the advertisement was correct, or whether it had the intended impact. It certainly created a great deal of confusion. On this issue, there is a genuine double threat which pensioners have rightly picked up. I have had more letters in my postbag this past fortnight about the threat to post offices than I have had during the whole of the Maastricht debate, which trundled on here for a considerable time. This is a tremendously important issue. I am a little dismayed by the fact that the Government must have realised the fear that was felt by pensioners about the threat to their post offices and the threat to their ability to draw at post offices the benefits to which they were entitled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles mentioned post offices in rural areas. My constituency has a fairly extensive rural area and the post offices there are as my hon. Friend describes. In the urban areas, sub-post offices are also centres of the communities in which they are located. I am sure that many hon. Members have gone past post offices on pension day. One certainly knows which day is pension day when one passes a sub-post office. The pensioners have a ritual of queueing there fairly early. I do not know whether it is because they think that the Government will cause a run on the pound. Sub-post offices are an important and integral part of most communities, whether urban or rural.

It is not only pensioners who go to sub-post offices. If sub-post offices are forced to close because of a lack of business in terms of benefits being paid out, there is no other place within the immediate area where people can get television licence stamps, television licences or saving stamps, and there is no other place where they can pay their water rates or their council tax bills. The sub-post office outlet is an important part of our communities.

Most of the pensioners to whom I have spoken and most of the letters that I have received from pensioners say that they do not want pensions to be paid into banks or into building societies by automated credit transfer—ACT. They want to retain the right to go to the post offices to draw their pensions, or, if they cannot draw their pensions themselves, to be able to have their families or nominated people to draw the pensions there for them.

The majority of pensioners do not have bank accounts or building society accounts, but that is not the only point. As a result of the banks' meanness in many respects, the fear has crept in that once pensioners are trapped into having their pensions paid into those establishments, they will start charging pensioners for the transactions into and out of the accounts. If money is paid into the account, it must come out of the account at some time. I understand that banks are looking closely at their charges to customers.

There is the twin fear about the monthly payment, which has been much mooted as a replacement for the weekly payment. Monthly payments are wrong in two respects. First, they will be paid in arrears. Pensioners already struggle in many respects. How on earth can they be expected to live for three weeks without a pension? It may be nice for people on large salaries to receive payments in arrears, but it is not good for people on low incomes, such as pensioners. Secondly, monthly payments will accelerate the closure of sub-post offices. Instead of a sub-post office doing four transactions a month, it will do only one. The position of sub-post offices is based on their throughput. If the throughput is on a monthly basis, it will obviously be very much reduced.

Sub-post offices are in communities, they serve communities and they are very much at the heart of communities. It would be a terrible loss to communities if they were closed. I should like the Minister to remove some of the fear that pensioners genuinely feel: that they are being thrust into the option of having their pensions paid by direct payment or paid monthly. That fear is being transmitted to pensioners who fear that their sub-post offices will be lost. I should like the Minister to give an assurance that no Government action will bring that about.

8.55 pm

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Like the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), I congratulate the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on succeeding in having this Adjournment debate tonight, which is important and most timely. I thank him not only for allowing me to take part in the debate, but for inviting me to take part in it. In his letter of invitation, he said that there was a significant point that we should all make and that it was important that it had cross-party support. I am delighted that he has been so generous and I thank him very much.

Although it may be true that technically I was the first to raise the matter in the House when I raised it last Thursday at Prime Minister's Question Time, I readily concede that the hon. Member for Western Isles must have applied for the debate before I put my question. Technically, I was the first, but I concede that he was the first in mental attitude, and I gladly make that point.

The hon. Member for Western Isles spent some time going through the forms which many of us have. I am glad that he did so, because there is little doubt that the forms are an attempt to encourage pensioners and others on benefits to use banks and building societies rather than the post offices. I have no wish to stop anyone using a bank or a building society if that is what they wish to do. I am sure that the hon. Members for Western Isles and for Nuneaton agree with that. That is all right if it is people's free choice and if they are not being led by the nose in another direction. One can imagine that for people who are a long way from a post office and for people who pay most of their bills by cheque, it might be an advantage for the pension to be paid into a bank and to be used to settle their bills by cheque. It could be a positive advantage for people

[Dr. Michael Clark]

who are housebound. But to lead the beneficiaries of payment to believe that there is only one major choice, a bank or a building society, is quite wrong.

I will not repeat what the hon. Member for Western Isles said about the forms—he went through them comprehensively. I just add one point. On the third form, the post office is not mentioned. At the bottom it says "By other means". At the top of the form, and on the other forms, when they want the pensioner or the person collecting benefit to use a bank or building society, the bank or buildingc society comes first in the hope that the pensioner will tick that first. On the third form there are two blocks. One is

"How often do you want your Retirement Pension paid? Every four weeks? Every 13 weeks?"

We know that most people want it every four weeks, so that comes first and every 13 weeks comes second, because it is the option that is less likely to be used. But when it comes to the bottom, if one can find the post office on the second form that the hon. Member for Western Isles referred to, what is the first question?

"Do you want to be paid by order book at a post office? No, Yes."

It is not very often in English that we suggest the answer in this form. It is usually "Yes or No". It is the same on the third form:

"Do you want to be paid by other means? No, Yes."

It is a rather strange use of English and it is attempting to lead in a certain direction.

If people want the money paid into the bank, there is little doubt that sooner or later they finish up with bank charges. Even if a charge is not made for collecting benefit, we all become overdrawn from time to time. Once that happens, the charges escalate out of all proportion. It will happen to people who are least able to pay bank charges.

The idea that people should be paid benefits three weeks in arrears is no inducement to having benefits paid into a bank or building society. Perhaps somewhere on the form it should say,

"If you do choose a bank or building society, you understand, do you not, that for the first month you will receive nothing at all? Now, do you want it paid into a bank or building society or would you like it paid by other means?"

But I do not see that anywhere on the form, which is less than completely honest and open.

There is another consideration. If anyone should choose payment into a bank or building society, it is possible that the account will be a joint one. Money will then be paid into an account over which the beneficiary does not have total control. This is particularly significant when it comes to child benefit. The whole philosophy behind child benefit as promulgated by the Department of Social Security is that it should be targeted on the mothers. In many cases it goes straight into the mother's purse and into the housekeeping for looking after children without the father having anything to do with it. That is essential in some instances, for reasons that we all know about, but if this benefit were paid into a joint bank account mothers would lose control of money that is meant to help them look after their children.

There have been several references to the fact that the forms seem designed to lead people to choose banks or building societies. That is the whole presumption. But it is not a true choice. The choice is there if one looks very hard for it. It is there in the first form; it is there, if one looks hard for it, in the second form; but in the third form one could be excused for thinking that there is no choice at all and, even if there is one, it is extremely well hidden. The Conservative party prides itself on offering choice, but in this regard we are not following the philosophy and manifesto of our own party.

We have heard that the post office network has 20,000 branches, but how many people realise that there are more post office branches than there are branches of the four major banks and the six major building societies combined? It is a marvellous network and an asset to the whole country, whether we live in the Western Isles, John o'Groats or Land's End. In those post offices, 40 per cent. of the business comes from the benefits and 50 per cent. of customers are there to collect the pensions or benefits. There is little doubt that if those receiving pensions and benefits are forced to have them paid into banks and building societies, the post offices will lose 40 per cent. of their business and 50 per cent. of their customers. That will undoubtedly lead to the closure of some post offices. I can see no alternative.

I do not suggest to the Minister that he removes the possibility of people having their benefit paid into a bank or building society—far from it, because I believe in choice —but the choice should be free and open, not guided.

A very strong campaign is going on at present and most hon. Members will have seen the leaflet put out by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. The campaign is slightly exaggerated, but I do not criticise it for that because any campaign worth its salt will be slightly exaggerated. One exaggerates to make a point and sometimes campaigns that are too modest fail to make their point at all.

I do not complain about the slight exaggeration, but I am concerned that, as a result of the campaign, many elderly, infirm and sick people are now worried sick that, in future, they will be unable to collect their pension in the normal way. The sooner we squash that anxiety and a categorical statement is issued from the Government to say that choice will remain, the sooner we can put at ease the anxieties and fears of many of our senior citizens in constituencies up and down and east and west of the country.

To deny choice will remove business from post offices and that will result in closures. Closures would, in due course, eliminate any choice for those who are in most need of it.

9.5 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Hon. Members are extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) not only for choosing to debate this issue on such a timely occasion, but for his foresight in doing so on an evening when we have the time to do it justice. I am also grateful to him for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate. I hope not to cover those matters which have already been mentioned.

I agree with the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), but I take issue with him on one small factual point, because this is not a problem that has just been mentioned in the House in the past few days. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and I were in the House some months ago before Christmas at 5.30 in the morning

to discuss it. You, too, were present, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you were, as always, wide awake while some of us were feeling rather sleepy.

My hon. Friend and I had looked forward in that debate because my hon. Friend had already received some answers from the Department that suggested that the Government were to pursue precisely the experiment that is now before us. We have now learnt the lesson to look at such proposals with a jaundiced eye. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) also raised this subject with the Prime Minister this afternoon.

We all agree that this is a matter of all-party concern. I am also pleased, as I am sure you are, Madam Deputy Speaker, that at least one Member representing the south-west is here to ensure that the concern felt in the Western Isles is reflected from the other end of the country. This matter concerns all of us who represent rural constituencies.

The concern that has already been made clear by other hon. Members is that, if discrimination and pressure are to be exerted, this proposal is a step in the wrong direction. If we are to have positive discrimination, it should be towards the essential, public social service that is provided by the sub-post office network.

The difference in attitude between the service that pensioners and other beneficiaries receive from sub-post offices and that which they could expect to receive from a bank or building society was revealed by the experience of one of my constituents. She had an occupational pension and, for reasons best known to her former employer, it was decided that it should be paid by ACT into a bank account. My constituent opened an account specifically for that purpose. Because she could not always get to the bank because of the distance involved and ill health, she made arrangements for someone to go there and cash a cheque on a weekly basis on her behalf.

My constituent found, however, that because the calculations were based on the 52 weeks of the year, the amount from the pension was never exactly the same to the nearest penny each week. That meant that when one cheque was presented for cashing and the sum was paid, she was 1p overdrawn. She then discovered that she was subject to bank charges. It is that difference in attitude between the traditional support and services that the sub-post office network has given and that offered by the only alternative, the banks and building societies, which is causing us so much concern.

Some 10 per cent. of sub-post offices have disappeared from the network in the past decade, and the proposal that the Department is apparently pursuing would turn that trickle into a veritable stream.

Hon. Members have said that about 40 per cent. of sub-post office turnover is for benefits of various sorts. In some parts of the country, notably rural areas with high levels of unemployment and perhaps above average numbers of retired people, it reaches 55 or even 60 per cent. of turnover. So the discrimination against rural areas, which can least afford the change, will be that much stronger.

In conjunction with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, my Liberal Democrat colleagues in the south-west and I have undertaken a number of surveys of the impact of the changes on the sub-post office network. It is clear from our work that upwards of 50 per cent. of village sub-post offices—we recognise that the same situation may not apply in the suburbs or more central areas—would be at risk if the proposals became so persuasive that large numbers of people switched to ACT.

In those circumstances, the domino effect to which hon. Members have referred would become dramatic. There would, first, be the removal of a slice of benefits. That would be followed by the sub-post office being reduced to community hours, because the number of units would not justify the full number of hours. That would make it less convenient for people in the local community. Finally, because the sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress found that it was not viable, not commercial, not worth the effort and perhaps not worth training or keeping staff for that purpose, the post office would go.

Of those in that category in Cornwall, 45 per cent. have the only village store alongside, in the same building and as part of the same business. So the removal of post office business puts at risk the only general store in the village. I can speak only from experience in the south-west, but in those circumstances, almost invariably the store will go, not only because of the reduction in turnover as the result of the removal of post office business itself but because if people are not drawing their cash over the counter at one side of the building they will not be spending it on the other side. So the store goes.

In Cornwall in those circumstances, the nearest general store will be, on average, two miles away. The people of whom we are speaking tonight, bearing in mind the limited access to public transort these days, and with only limited access to private transport, will be badly cut off. I recently received a letter from a gentleman who was being persuaded to switch his Government occupational pension to a bank account. He explained that to get to his nearest bank would mean a £15 return taxi fare, which would remove a fair slice from any money that he received. The average distance in Cornwall from some villages to the nearest bank branch is more than 10 miles.

I hope that we shall hear from the Minister tonight not just that the Department will take seriously the criticisms that hon. Members in all parts of the House have made, but that they are prepared to open a dialogue again wth the Post Office. In recent days, Bill Cockburn, the Post Office's chief executive, has drawn attention to the fact that about 5,000 rural post offices are at stake as a result of the proposals and that many thousands of people would be affected by their closure. He said:

"If such a thing were to happen, the entire network of post offices would be on the line".

He put forward a practical, sensible, up-to-date and modern suggestion. He said that the Post Office should work with the Department to develop a high-tech solution in the form of plastic cards which would, he claimed, enable customers to have their payments swiftly dealt with without difficulty through terminals in sub-post offices and with electronic links to the Department. He pointed out:

"A third of the PO's income is generated by DSS payments at 20,000 outlets."

I do not intend to repeat points that have already been made, but for the benefit of all concerned—sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses, pensioners and all those who live in remote areas or in any village that could be affected—we need a clear statement. I hope that the Minister's reply will offer opportunities for dialogue with the management of the Post Office and reassurance for all those who would be affected by a switch to ACT.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

I hope, too, that the statement will show clearly that the Department and the Government recognise the value of a national network of post office outlets. As the hon. Member for Rochford said, it is unique to this country and is widely appreciated. If the Minister and the Department are able to do that, I am sure that it will be welcomed in all parts of the House. This, I hope, is the last that we shall hear of this preposterous proposition.

9.15 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I, too, am grateful to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) for initiating this Adjournment debate. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, we have heard the voice of the north and the south. The Ordnance Survey map shows that the Ribble valley is in the centre of the United Kingdom, so we are covering almost every part of the country in the debate.

My constituency is extremely rural and contains many rural post offices. In some villages, the post office is the only shop. It would be absolutely insane of me to say that post offices should be allowed to survive on their own. Some of them would be unable to do so. Nevertheless, we have to wake up to the reality that many of our rural post offices were under attack well before the introduction of automated credit transfers.

The opening hours of some village post offices in my constituency have been greatly reduced over the years. The hours have been so contracted in one rural post office that one wonders whether it is worth its remaining open. In another village, the post office operates from a pub. It is in Pendleton. The pub is the "Swan with Two Necks". Customers have to go to the pub for their postal requirements. That is an imaginative compromise.

We may have to look at innovative ideas so that new life may be breathed into our post offices to ensure that they survive. Some people may prefer ACT instead of having to go to the post office every few weeks. Given the choice, many pensioners may start to drift away from the post office. We must take a realistic look, therefore, at how we are to breathe new life into rural post offices and village stores. Some post offices sell other goods. The turnover of some of them is low and the profits marginal. They work right on the edge between profitability and loss.

Stamps can now be bought in virtually any shop. That was not the case 15 or so years ago. Stamps could be obtained only from the post office and between certain hours, which was nonsense. Nobody would argue today that stamps ought to be sold only by post offices.

If we are to attempt to breathe new life into post offices, we ought to consider freeing up post offices so that they can become agencies for banks and building societies. In some small towns and villages, banks and building societies are closing. A building society branch has recently closed in one village in my constituency.

We should also look at beefing up the Giro bank so that those pensioners who decide that they wish to take their pensions via ACT can do so easily through post offices. The hon. Member for North Cornwall suggested that we should also consider the use of hi-tech in post offices so that they are able to retain their customers.

Fraud related to pensions and social security payments is running at £100 million a year, and the current administration costs amount to £400 million, so it is clear that something must be done. At the same time, I support the general thrust of the idea that pensioners must be given a choice. Those who want to have their pensions paid by the traditional method are entitled to that facility. However, fresh and lively ideas must be considered so that post offices in outlying regions may be given a new lease of life well into the next century.

9.20 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this matter before the House. Many hon. Members, from all parties and from many parts of the country, have been given an opportunity to express their concern—concern which has been expressed also in the very many letters that hon. Members, including myself, have received. The constituency that I represent includes urban and rural areas. Of course, this debate is about the rural aspect of the problem, and because its communities are scattered the Western Isles area is very vulnerable. But even in urban areas, many small and distinct communities, such as Riddings in the borough of Scunthorpe, are very concerned about the future of their post offices.

If we encourage measures as a result of which people do not have a clear choice, many post offices will no longer be viable. Indeed, many rural offices are under considerable threat already. I recently had an opportunity to discuss with the Minister the closure of the sorting offices in the villages of Messingham, Winterton and Burton upon Stather, which very nearly lost their postal delivery staff as well. Fortunately, we managed to have that facility saved. There is no doubt that privatisation in particular has introduced a new element of ruthlessness into the Post Office. If the viability of sub-post offices is in question, they will undoubtedly fail to survive.

The Minister is not responsible for the Department of Social Security or its policies, but he is responsible for the future of sub-post offices. Many of those who run these offices are small business people. The offices are privately run on a franchise basis, and the businesses are liable to be wiped out. It is ironic that a party which claims to be for small businesses is putting the knife into many people who already face very great difficulty. When one talks to small business people, one discovers that they no longer believe that the Government are for them.

Many villages—even larger ones like Messingham—have had the experience of their one and only bank closing down and departing due to lack of viability. When the nearest bank is several miles away, it is not sensible to suggest that it would be convenient for people to have benefits paid into bank accounts. Post offices provide other very important services to many people, particularly the elderly. For example, a constituent of mine who is blind relies on people in her sub-post office to help her to fill in forms. No doubt many banks would be willing to provide such a service, but in terms of community care and support there is a distinct difference between a bank and a sub-post office. There is also the social dimension. Many people meet weekly at the post office and, as has been said, they tend to buy goods and services. That is very important for the viability of these establishments. All those are under threat. I hope that the points about monthly payments will be noted. Many pensioners on limited incomes would find

it difficult to budget with monthly payments and should have the choice of weekly payments. That provision should be protected.

Bank charges have been mentioned. It is inevitable that the major banks will impose charges on personal accounts. There has been talk of that for some time. We have heard about the dreadful charges made to people who slip into overdraft, including excessive charges for the letters telling them that they are overdrawn.

People should have a choice as to how they are paid and whether payment is made monthly or weekly. The forms should not be bullying; they should not suggest to people who are not used to filling in forms, and who find them intimidating, that they will not have a choice.

Above all, we want to hear from the Minister that he will defend our system of sub-post offices. Without doubt, the proposed change would rip the heart out of many communities because it would remove an essential facility which provides community support and is convenient for many people, particularly in isolated rural areas. The change would also undermine the position of many families who have put much investment into their sub-post office businesses and who have given enormous support and commitment to the people whom they know and serve well. Consideration must be given to those people, and choice on the method of payment must be protected.

9.26 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I want to add my weight to what has been said. I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on achieving the debate. I represent an area in the southern part of Scotland. My constituency of Midlothian is made up of small towns, villages and hamlets. It borders the southern uplands of Scotland, with the Moorfoot hills on one side and the Pentlands on the other.

I do not want to repeat other speeches, but I support most of what has been said. I am worried about the lack of mobility of the people we are talking about. We have already heard that there are no bus services in some rural areas. The geographical spread of post offices is ideal. If we wanted to start from scratch to provide a post office system, we would probably place them where they are. Banks and building societies are inclined to cluster around one another. In a small town, they are all in the same street, next door to one another. That provides a choice for those who are mobile, but there are no banks in many hamlets and villages. That must be taken into account when the Minister revises Government policy, which I hope he will do.

I do business with banks in Scotland, and they are no worse than other banks. Sometimes they ask for a minimum of, say, £50 to be kept in an account to keep it in credit. Some pensioners could not afford to leave £50 in a bank account. With our salaries, we may not be concerned about other aspects concerning cheques, but when people have small, fixed incomes, every pound and every penny count.

Opening times are also important. Post offices are open longer and have more convenient opening times than some banks. That is another aspect that must be taken into cognisance when we are talking about this problem.

I shall end with this plea, because I do not want to repeat what has been said—although I endorse everything that has been said. I want to add my weight to the debate, because the problem is not peculiar to rural areas. Obviously, the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles could not be more rural. Some of the sub-post offices are in small towns. I was approached by a sub-postmaster in Dalkeith, which is a small town, who is worried that his income will drop and he will have to close. Will we see huge queues in the few sub-post offices that will be left? When payments are made, people form huge queues. If those payments are spread out, it is done in an amicable way.

I hope that the Minister will take on board what has been said. We sincerely mean what we say—it is not a matter of scoring points. We are not here to be clever, and we are not in a position to score political or any other points. We are making a plea on behalf of the people who need our help. I am sure that we all care for the people in our communities who need help.

9.30 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I should like to pay my respects on the death of Robert Adley. As a railway enthusiast all my life, I regarded him as a doyen of the railway world. As well as the loss to his family and the House, he will be a great loss to the railway industry at a time when people with his knowledge have never been more needed.

I do not want to repeat what has been said by other hon. Members. When Baroness Thatcher was Prime Minister, I remember her saying that there was no such thing as community. I am pleased that the hon. Members for Rochford (Dr. Clark) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) have shown that she was wrong in this, as she was in so many other things. I hope that this debate will be a precursor to debates that will save post offices. Much has been said about the deprivation of pensioners and so on, but the real issue is the loss of sub-post offices in rural areas. That is the most important aspect of the matter.

Perhaps I have been fortunate in my life, in that I have lived in many areas where there were post offices. I have lived in rural, semi-rural and extremely rural districts—I have seen it all. I have always been struck by the fact that, the more rural an area, the more important the sub-post office. I must declare a slight interest because, in my younger days, I had aspirations to own and run a sub-post office. It seemed to be an admirable way to serve society. Although I imagine that it would not be profitable, it would be a worthwhile life.

Although my constituency is mainly urban, some sections are semi-rural. The loss of post offices in my constituency would diminish the quality of life for the people who live there. The village where I live, which is not in my constituency, is a good example of the problem. If there were no post office in my village, people would need to take a bus ride costing £1·07 each way into Durham city to get to a post office—the bus service runs hourly. I am talking not simply about pensioners but about disabled people, unemployed people—there are many of them in my part of the world—and young mothers with children, who greatly appreciate and rely entirely on the post office for many things.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley referred to post offices in business. Post offices often provide services that are only marginally profitable. Such services would not be acceptable as a business in their own right. A post office in

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

my village sells wool—it is the only place that does—and provides a clothes cleaning service. Those are valuable services.

There is nothing new about the threat to close sub-post offices. To my knowledge, the same threat has been made for the past five or six years. There were rumours that sub-post offices would be drastically cut because of the expenditure involved but they were retracted. However, they continue to come back in different guises. I am sure that Conservative Members represent more rural communities than Labour Members. We represent many towns and cities.

The Post Office has operated a wonderful service for more than 100 years, and it is now more vital than ever for old people to have a post office service close at hand. In years ahead, a larger percentage of the population will be old; moreover, they will be living even longer. Some people do not live within 10 miles of a bank—not just those living in the back of beyond; bank branches are now closing at a fair rate of knots, as are some building society offices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) represents a constituency adjoining mine. Although, as a Whip, he cannot speak in the debate, in many ways he could make a better speech than any of us, given that his constituency contains remote villages without good bus services. It is vital for all hon. Members affected by the proposals to listen to what their constituents have to say, and to impress their views on the Government.

I am always very wary of the "balance the books" mentality. It is all very well to say that excessive expenditure is at the root of a problem, and that specific action can be taken to solve it; it is all a bit like the oxo game—having dealt with one square, we find that there are eight more, each of which affects the one adjoining it.

The Government may hope to obtain short-term relief in the form of savings on the cost of benefits, but the long-term deprivation and the social costs involved could far outweigh any savings. Not many hon. Members are present tonight, but I hope that those who are present will try to persuade their colleagues of the importance of retaining what is perhaps the most important service enjoyed by villages, semi-rural areas and, often, urban areas.

9.36 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) for introducing the debate, and for allowing others to speak.

Pensioners currently feel that they are under siege. They face a rise in fuel bills as result of the application of VAT and its extension to standing charges; the pressure on council finances poses a threat to their concessionary fares; crime is escalating in their neighbourhoods, and they feel that they are prisoners in their own homes. Now, on top of all that, their local post offices are threatened. They are being pressurised to leave a system that they have known for many years, and to pay money into their bank accounts. Of course that should be an option, but it should not be pressed to the extent that it has been, to the detriment of many post offices.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have cited many reasons to oppose the Government's plans, but there are others. It has been pointed out that bank branches are far less accessible than local post offices; that trend is increasing as the main banks close many of their outlying branches in a process that they describe as rationalisation. "Closure" would be a better description. Many pensioners will find it even more difficult to reach their branches if their concessionary bus passes are taken away.

The weight of correspondence received by hon. Members illustrates the difference between the relationship of banks with their customers and that of post offices with theirs. Does anyone seriously imagine that the banks could have mounted the campaign mounted by sub-postmasters in defence of their system? Pensioners clearly appreciate that—if, that is, they have an account at all. Yesterday, a parliamentary written answer revealed that 30 per cent. of those in receipt of benefit have no bank account. Indeed, I doubt whether many banks would be keen on such accounts: they seem to be putting great pressure on small account holders, and—as has been said—imposing charges.

We know the worry caused to pensioners by official letters from bank managers. There have been some tragic cases of suicide.

Pensions will be paid either four or 13 weeks in arrears. The pensioners and many others on benefit in my constituency are having trouble living from week to week and from day to day. If they have to budget one month at a time, some will be able to do so, but for a considerable number that will be a major burden and pressure.

For all those reasons, I hope that the Minister will admit that the Government have been found out and will give in on the forms with good grace. I hope that they will scrap the experiment and tonight give a message of good news to pensioners and their friends, the postmasters.

9.40 pm

Mr. Jimmy Boyce (Rotherham): Like other speakers, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) for tonight's debate, and all hon. Members who have spoken in it. It has been a constructive debate; I think that the House performs at its best when we listen to other speakers. I am as guilty as anyone of baying and braying across the Chamber, but it has been extremely edifying to sit quietly and listen to other hon. Members make their speeches.

The debate is not about right and left, but about right and wrong. The proposals are out of order and wrong. They benefit nobody except the Exchequer. Therefore, the Government's proper role of looking after people—certainly as they become older—is being denied.

I do not know who first raised the matter in the House. Before last Thursday, I received letters from pensioners in my constituency. Some of them expressed anger, some frustration and others total disbelief at the proposal. I wrote back to them saying that I would support their campaign to keep open the sub-post offices where they collected their pensions. My letter was fairly standard because one cannot say much more than that one will or will not support the campaign.

Last Thursday, the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) asked the Prime Minister a question:

"Is my right hon. Friend receiving letters, as I am, from pensioners and others receiving benefit who are concerned in case that benefit should be paid exclusively into banks and building societies? Will he confirm that benefit will continue to be available from post offices and sub-post offices, thus giving the customers a choice in line with Conservative policy?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"This is a matter on which concern is raised from time to time. We have made no proposals to make those changes. If we had any firm proposals to make those changes, we would bring them before the House."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. 283.]

I was immediately relieved and, by telephone, arranged for the standard letter to be altered, because letters were still arriving for me. I changed the standard letter to say that the Prime Minster had given an assurance that the House would debate the matter before the changes took place. As it is not a right and left issue, but a right and wrong issue, I believed that the House would not support the proposal. I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Rochford for obtaining that reply from the Prime Minister, with which I was delighted. I am now receiving "thank you" letters for removing some of the anger, frustration and disbelief that people felt.

More importantly, I believe that today the Prime Minister stood on its head his message of only seven days ago—I shall have to read the *Official Report* tomorrow to make sure of that. I am extremely worried that the changes are to take place and that people are being encouraged, by stealth or subterfuge, to follow such a course of action. As the hon. Member for Rochford said, the forms are designed in such a manner as to obtain a particular result: "Would you like to win a million pounds—yes or no?" Of course we know the answer. I can remember working in Blackpool as a photographer some years ago. The spiel we gave people was, "Would you like a set of three or the half dozen?" Much the same principle applies here.

I believe that the Prime Minister today overturned what he said last week. If he did, I will have to tell people that I am sorry about the first letter saying that we needed a campaign, and about the second, saying that the campaign was off; but here is a third letter, saying that the campaign is back on again. That is no way to run a country. If the Government have proposals, let them come clean and bring them before the House. If they do so, the proposal will be defeated by the integrity of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

9.45 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Much of the case has been made already, so I shall be brief. We want the Minister to respond to the points that have been made so that we can intervene in his speech for clarification.

I was much taken by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington). I know his constituency well; it contains Roker Park, the home of Sunderland football club. My father was born in the constituency, which contains a great many terraced houses and all sorts of different areas. My hon. Friend described the sub-post offices in those areas, some of which are urban, some semi-rural and some extremely rural.

My constituency, too, contains every category of area. To the north lie the outer suburbs of Sheffield—a highly urbanised place with good sub-post office provision. Then there are the semi-rural areas containing former colliery villages with adjoining fields and farms. All sorts of history and traditions are represented in my constituency.

The very rural parts are in west Derbyshire and the Derbyshire dales, where people have been devastated by some of the changes of recent years—changes which have led to a lack of community transport and many of the other problems that hon. Members have mentioned today.

My constituency contains a wide variety of political strongholds. It is divided into solid Labour areas and solid Conservative areas. On this issue I have received representations from both, particularly from the rural areas which should be natural Conservative strongholds. The Government should respond to the feelings of people in these areas.

Sub-postmasters are often important figures in local government, serving on parish and district councils. Amazingly enough, because sub-post offices have become communal centres on which people depend, these sub-postmasters can get elected either as independents or even as representatives of parties which would not do well in normal circumstances in a particular area.

We should bear that sort of loyalty and community feeling in mind, because it shows that there is something about sub-post offices of such importance that it needs to be preserved. Therefore, we want neither measures that would ruin sub-post offices nor the privatisation which might follow.

9.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Boyce) referred to the number of letters that he has recently received on this subject. We have all received similar postbags. I sometimes ruefully reflect that if it were not for the scaremongering campaigns that occur at various times during the year and that generate large amounts of post, the position of the Post Office might be rather less viable than it is. Members of Parliament perform a valuable function in helping to support the Post Office network.

I am happy to join with hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on drawing his place in the ballot and choosing this subject for debate. As has been said, he has been fortunate, and we have been fortunate in having an unusually extended debate on the Adjournment. As I was in charge of earlier business—the debate on the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill—I could have filibustered myself by keeping the debate on that Bill going so as to close off the Adjournment debate. I would not have wished to do that because this is an important matter for all our constituents, and it is right that we should debate it.

The hon. Member has stolen a march on his own Front Bench and anticipated the debate that will be held next Wednesday. We are just a warm-up act, and the star turns will have their opportunity next week. Let us compare the quality of the two debates. As the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) said, the debate has been conducted in an unusual spirit for the House of cool, calm reflection without all the heat of the party battle. I venture to think that our debate will be rather more good tempered and good humoured, and perhaps will generate more light than heat, than that which will be held next Wednesday.

I am grateful for the opportunity to place on record the Government's views on this important matter. I share opinions on it with hon. Members who have spoken from both sides of the House. As an individual Member of

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

Parliament, and as a member of the Government, I am particularly well aware of the great value placed on the local post office in smaller rural communities. I have some 35 post offices within my constituency, which has some substantial rural areas. I know the high regard in which they are held by everybody, from pensioners to young mothers, and by all the other groups mentioned by hon. Members.

I doff my cap in the direction of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and admit that my parents-in-law live in a small rural village in the depths of Cornwall, perhaps even more remote than the villages in his constituency because they live on the Lizard peninsula. I can also tell him that they are Liberal voters, but I have never held that against them, and even on that account I would not wish to close their local post office.

We all understand that the local post office is not just somewhere to buy stamps or collect pensions. As many hon. Members have said, it is often the focal point of the community. I hardly ever use a bank because I regularly cash cheques here in the post office of the House of Commons, which is open at much more user-friendly hours than any bank. Nobody can doubt our commitment, both collectively as a Government and individually as Members of Parliament, to this important national institution.

The Government's commitment to a nation-wide network of post offices is unequivocal. Hon. Members have asked me to place on record a commitment that we will maintain a viable national network of post offices. I am happy to do that. In so doing, I am not saying anything that the House will not have heard before. We wrote that commitment into our manifesto. None of the other parties did so. That is not to impute that they are not as committed to that aim as we are, but we thought it was useful and valuable to make that commitment during the election campaign. When my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the review of the future structure and organisation of the Post Office last July, he made it clear that that commitment was not negotiable, and I have great pleasure in repeating it this evening.

I should like to explode two myths about the Post Office which often surface to call that commitment into question. The first myth is that the Post Office is in steep and inexorable decline, and the second is that the Government are gradually destroying the viability of post offices by reducing the amount of business that is put their way. I am glad to be able to tell the House that there is no truth in either of those tales. The Post Office is one of a rare breed: it is a popular and relatively successful nationalised industry. Whether it could be even more successful in the private sector is another issue which I may touch on later in the debate.

As Government, we aim to open up new opportunities for the Post Office in order to support the viability of an institution to which we are all committed. The Royal Mail is flourishing today as never before, and is widely recognised as one of the best postal services in the world. Over the past decade, Post Office Counters Ltd. has been consistently profitable, with a growing turnover and rising standards of customer services. Rumours of its demise are greatly exaggerated and do not accord with the historical trend.

How have the misunderstandings that have been alluded to in the debate come about? As with other economic developments, we always hear about the bad news, but rarely about the steady improvements and the winning of new business. As so often with the media, bad news is good news and good news is no news. We hear not about steady improvements but about closures and other deteriorations. I do not know why that happens, but there have been a number of reflections on the subject recently as a result of some remarks by Martyn Lewis.

There has been a steady improvement in the Post Office, and new business has been won. The effect of the automated credit transfer system, which gave rise to the debate, is a case in point. There was a time when the only way in which to collect a state pension or other state benefit was over the post office counter. Then, in 1982, we introduced the option of having pensions or child benefits paid directly into personal bank or building society accounts. Nearly half of new pensioners now choose that option, but when it was first introduced it was widely feared that it heralded the beginning of the end for the Post Office. That fear was widely expressed in the House at the time. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark)—or was it my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)?—mentioned the diversification of post office services into other shops in the rural community. That development too gave rise to the claim that it heralded the end of the Post Office.

In fact, by a combination of options that have been introduced over the years, we have improved the delivery of services to the consumer. That may not necessarily involve the use of the post office or the sub-post office, but the consequence has not been the disappearance of post offices, especially rural sub-post offices, as an important part of local communities. In spite of the gradually increasing proportion of business going to banks and building societies, the total volume of DSS business, and hence of Government business in total, transacted through post offices has increased. The share of the pie may be smaller, but as the pie itself is bigger, the Post Office has not lost out.

The hon. Member for Western Isles mentioned the citizens charter in his opening speech. In the citizens charter we made it clear that we would extend the range of choice open to recipients of other benefits by giving them the option of having their benefits paid into bank or building society accounts. Last November the Secretary of State for Social Security announced that he would encourage more people to use that method of payment, which is cheaper to administer than post office order books, and also more secure.

It is true that there is a cost attached to different methods of payment, and in so far as we use less efficient or more costly systems of payment, the sums expended on those are not available to be spent in many other socially useful ways. Although I am saying this in a neutral way, we ought to consider as a background to this debate what the costs are.

The total cost to the DSS of paying child benefit by post office order book is currently nearly twice as high as the cost of paying it through ACT. With pensions, it is about 10 times as high. If the Post Office payment system were to be automated, the difference in cost would be considerably

smaller. The point was made in the course of the debate, I think by the hon. Member for North Cornwall, that Mr. Cockburn's recent remarks about improvements in service delivery through post offices could reduce costs without reducing the degree of usage of the post office. I happily tell him this evening that we are——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Mr. Hamilton: I happily tell the hon. Gentleman that of course we will consider that, and any other proposal which has the effect of improving the service delivery to consumers and making it more efficient, because those efficiency savings can be passed on to the community in a variety of other valuable ways. It cannot be right for us to close our eyes to these opportunities, because it is opportunities that we are talking about.

I fully understand the nature of the fears that have been expressed in this debate, and I want to deal with them this evening.

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister took up the reference to the citizens charter. Does he accept that, as a matter of principle, full information about the choices available to pensioners should be given to them; that, as a matter of principle, it should be as easy for them to choose one option as to choose any other? There should be a level playing field available to pensioners when these options are presented to them.

Mr. Hamilton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the forms to which he referred in some detail in the course of his speech are part of a trial which the Department of Social Security has been engaged in in an attempt to test the popularity of the different methods of payment. I have heard the criticisms that he and other hon. Members have made, and the Secretary of State for Social Security will, of course, in evaluating the response to the different forms which have been issued, bear all those criticisms in mind.

It is not for me, as a Department of Trade and Industry Minister, to second-guess what my right hon. Friend in the DSS willl say in due course, because the evaluation exercise has not yet been completed. But the fears that have been expressed by hon. Members this evening will, of course, form the backdrop to the evaluation, along with all the other responses that are received.

Mr. Olner: A few moments ago the Minister used the word "encourage". I get the impression that the Secretary of State for Social Security is doing more than encourage people with market testing and making people choose between one form of payment and another. People throughout the country can see that they are being coerced, not encouraged, to have their benefits paid through ACT or on a monthly basis. It is time that the Government came clean about this. This is why the pensioners are fearful of what is going on.

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot say any more than I have said already. I can only repeat that this is a trial. Each form has been issued to about 8,000 people, I believe. When the responses have been evaluated, the Department will be able to see the popularity of each option. Of course, if there is a design flaw in the forms and that view is accepted by the Department, that will form the backdrop to the decision. I am not in a position this evening to agree with hon. Members who have expressed their fears on this subject in the House and elsewhere, but I can say that their criticisms have been heard.

Dr. Michael Clark: It gives me no pleasure to disagree with my hon. Friend, but I shall do so for a second. My hon. Friend said that the forms were designed to test the popularity of different methods of payment of benefits and of pensions. I take issue with him on that. The forms are not designed to test the popularity of different methods of payment. If they were, we should have the level playing field that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) mentioned. The forms are designed to discover how effectively the wool can be pulled over the eyes of those who receive pensions and benefits. They have nothing to do with the popularity of the form of payment.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Western Isles have explained the nature of the three forms, each of which I have here this evening. Their comments have been heard. I have made my own comments and I have explained the reason for the issuing of the forms. I have also explained that, when the results are complete, the Department of Social Security will take a view on the basis of everything that has been said as part of the whole debate on the matter.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I apologise for not having been here for most of the debate; I had another engagement. I entirely agree with the two points just made. No one in the House believes more fervently in freedom of choice than my hon. Friend the Minister. However, to test what people want, they must be told that they can continue to receive their benefits through post offices. I suspect that in many cases there are advantages for them in doing so, certainly in a remote rural constituency such as mine. Surely, if there is to be proper market testing, we must tell people that it is not a question of their having to be paid through the banks and building societies, but that there is also the option of their continuing to be paid through sub-post offices, especially village sub-post offices. That is the only fair way to test this.

Mr. Hamilton: I do not accept that the third form mentioned, which seems to have generated the most controversy, precludes the use of post offices from the delivery of the service. However, I shall draw my hon. Friend's words to the attention of my mother-in-law, who is one of his constituents. Whether the consequence will be that she votes for him at the next election, I cannot say.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister said just now that he could not second-guess the views of his colleagues in the Department of Social Security and we understand that. I wonder whether he will be quite so specific on the next point. A week ago, the Prime Minister appeared to say unequivocally that the Government were not committed to pressurising people towards the ACT method with which we are all concerned this evening. However, this afternoon, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), he appeared to be ambivalent; he appeared to equivocate. The Minister mentioned the political allegiance of his mother-in-law. For her benefit, for my benefit and for the benefit of the House, will the Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister was correct last week or whether he was correct this afternoon? I do not

[Mr. Tyler]

expect him to answer on behalf of the Department of Social Security, but I am sure that he has been fully briefed this evening on the views of No. 10.

Mr. Hamilton: Beauty, like ambivalence, is in the eye of the beholder. All I can say is that the Government are perfectly consistent at all times. I do not have here the words that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister uttered in the House this afternoon. I heard them at the time, but I admit that I cannot now remember exactly what he said. All I can say is that, whatever words were used in the House this afternoon, the commitment is exactly the same as that given last week.

I was making a point about the effects of ACT on the Post Office system and on its connection with the diversification of Post Office services. As with all other businesses, some lines of work will increase while others decline. New opportunities are opening for the Post Office which should bolster its position. One promising prospect, for example, could be the retailing of the national lottery. We do not yet know whether the Post Office will win a contract to sell lottery tickets, but we have extended its statutory powers so that it will be able to bid for the contract. Who knows how much business that could generate if the Post Office were successful? It could be an important element in the underpinning of the Post Office network throughout the country. Of course, I am not the Secretary of State for National Heritage. If only I were Prime Minister, it would be much more convenient, and I could answer all the points made in the debate. Perhaps I will be, one day.

Mr. Boyce: The way the hon. Member is carrying on, upsetting most of his Back Bench colleagues, it is hardly likely. I want to take up the point about post offices selling lottery tickets. That is a good proposal, but if the Government have taken away people's rights to draw their pensions at the post office, the purpose of this debate is defeated. The debate is about pensioners drawing pensions from post offices. Any additional business for post offices is a good thing, but the debate is not about that.

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman poses a hypothesis. It is not Government policy to remove the right of pensioners to receive their pensions from the post office. As was said by the hon. Member for North Cornwall, the Prime Minister said last week that our policy was to encourage people to receive benefits through their accounts, while maintaining a viable network of post office outlets. So the two are not necessarily inconsistent. As was written in our manifesto, we are absolutely committed to the maintenance of a viable network of post offices throughout the country.

To return to the forms which have been sent out, I am well aware of the concern that has been expressed about the recent trial. It has been noticed in ministerial postbags as well. But I want to stress that the trial is only a trial and is merely to test the impact of different methods of presentation. I have heard the criticisms that my hon. Friends and others have made this evening, but the Department of Social Security is looking at ways of encouraging the take-up of automated credit transfer on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I would like to continue, if I may, because, as a result of willingly taking interventions, I am falling behind with my speech and I shall be unable to answer, even in three quarters of an hour, all the points made in the debate, which I am anxious to do.

Redesign of some of the forms is one of the ways being considered. None of the forms is intended to deprive benefit recipients of the option of being paid through the post office. I understand that all three forms indicated that a choice of payent methods was available, but I have heard the criticisms made by my hon. Friends, in particular, about the clarity of the way in which a particular choice was put before people. I can assure my hon. Friends that those points will be read with great care by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security in the morning.

The hon. Member for Western Isles asked me for two commitments. He asked if the Government would retract their policy to encourage pensioners to use ACT. I am afraid that I cannot give him the commitment that he sought. We have been encouraging the take-up of ACT for 10 years and we shall continue to do so. I have explained the cost background and the benefits that will flow from making the system more efficient.

The hon. Member also asked me if the test trial forms would be shredded and new ones produced with "comprehensive and unbiased" information. The management of the trial is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I repeat the point that I have just made. It is no more than a test, and my right hon. Friend needs to assess the results before he can decide how to redesign the forms. No doubt he will take account of that point before making any decision in that respect.

Although we have a viable system of post offices around the country, particularly in rural areas, I realise that this particular claim may sound rather hollow to those living in areas which have lost their local post offices in recent years. Although that is sad, it is not something that is a feature of the 1990s or of Conservative Governments. In the past five years, the number of post offices has fallen by 1,151, but under the Labour Government a similar fall—of 1,190—occurred between 1974 and 1979. The figures are almost identical. Between 1965 and 1970, 541 post offices were closed.

The trend of post office closure has gone on for some time and at the end of each year there are usually a smaller number of post offices than there were at the beginning of it. If that trend continued, however, one would cease to have a viable national network. Many of the arguments that have been put forward today with such vigour and eloquence could equally have been made at any time in the past 30 years, given the steady decline in the number of post offices.

A large networked organisation such as Post Office Counters Ltd. is generally successful, but some individual post offices are struggling. Demographic changes and changes in shopping patterns mean that in certain areas the viability of post offices grows weaker. Rural offices, in particular, are vulnerable to those changes as traditional village life changes and declines. I deplore that because I live in a small village and I particularly value its community life.

Mr. Harris: Surely we should be looking at new ways in which to attract extra business to post offices. My hon. Friend has already mentioned, quite properly, the

possibility of their selling lottery tickets, but we should ease the restrictions and inhibitions on post offices so that they can do other business. Another feature of rural areas —it is certainly true of mine, as it no doubt is of my hon. Friend's constituency—is that the sub-branches of the banks are closing down. Why not lift the inhibitions from sub-post offices so that they can do a deal with the banks to act as their agents? That would encourage the viability of those post offices. We must not be defeatist about village post offices.

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and that is the value of the Post Office review, which is under way at the moment. That review has led to exactly the same type of scaremongering as that which has given rise to the campaign mentioned in the debate. Because the Government do not want to set parameters on the general review of opportunities open to the Post Office, we could be asked to rule out various options. Eventually, we would end up with a real dog's breakfast.

As in so many areas, nationalisation has imposed restrictions on the development of an important industry. If those restrictions were removed, it could offer new life to a great national institution. The post office review will certainly consider all the options, such as those suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). I hope that that review will breathe new life into the post office system.

The Post Office is very keen to be released from the bonds and shackles of state control. Consequently, it would be wrong if we dismissed any options. I regret, therefore, the timidity of those who have poured scorn on the Post Office review and have caused many people to worry unduly about its outcome.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I am reluctant to do so because the hon. Gentleman was not here for much of the debate and I want to respond to those hon. Members who have been present throughout.

It is always regrettable when a local post office has to close, but I am pleased to say that for an increasing number of smaller offices salvation has been found in the introduction of community post offices.

Offices are open on a part-time basis, according to the level of business transacted. The Post Office introduced that programme in 1988 and it has proved successful in keeping a local service going which might otherwise have been withdrawn following the retirement of the existing sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress. That is a current problem. There are many instances where a sub-postmaster retires and the post office cannot find a replacement. Indeed, it is a serious problem in some rural areas.

I do not know if it is a problem in the Western Isles, where there are 85 post offices. As the hon. Member for that constituency said eloquently in his speech, the local post office is the most widespread meeting point and community institution in that scattered area. Finding a successor to the postmaster or postmistress is a serious problem in some parts of the country.

Hon. Members are familiar with some of the more colourful examples of community offices mentioned in recent debates about the rural network. They illustrate the benefits of flexibility and the opportunity to develop that has arisen in recent years. Community post offices have opened in pubs, churches, even garden sheds and front rooms. That trend would not have been thinkable prior to the developments of recent years.

I agree with the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) that if it were Government policy to close rural sub-post offices it would be a foolish policy. That is not our policy. Curiously enough, there has been much community of interest and agreement in the debate, and it has in many ways been similar to the previous debate in which I starred— *[Interruption.]* I was searching for the right word, which sometimes eludes me.

There is a commitment to achievement of the same objective. The means by which we would get there may be different, but our objective is the same. We have affirmed our commitment to the nationwide network of post offices, including the rural network.

The fact that Government business transacted through post offices has not decreased but increased in each of the last few years is a demonstrable illustration of the Government's commitment to the policy that we declared in our manifesto. The Post Office is making strenuous efforts, in particular in co-operation with the Rural Development Commission, to keep small rural post offices open, particularly in areas where changing shopping patterns have been threatening their viability.

As I come to the question of the Post Office review, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, who dealt with the matter in the context of his extremely scattered constituency, which I know well as I spent some time there in a by-election not long ago— *[Interruption.]* In the general election I was otherwise engaged in my own constituency. The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), with his usual percipience, spotted why my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley lost the by-election but won the general election.

I appreciate that his constituency is scattered and that the importance of the local post office in Ribble Valley is not to be understated. The Post Office review gives great opportunity, as my hon. Friend recognised, for scattered rural areas of that kind. I cannot tonight state when our decisions will be made public because no decisions have yet been made, but my hon. Friend can rest assured that when we have something to say on the matter it will be announced to the House. In the meantime, I assure everybody that the review is being undertaken with no preconceptions as to its outcome and that we are looking at both public and private sector options.

It has been said tonight that the privatisation of the Post Office might lead to large numbers of post office closures. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) said that. Although no decisions have been made—so speculation about the effect of privatisation would be idle—I believe that the impact of greater flexibility to which loosening the bonds of state control has given rise in other formerly nationalised industries would be to the benefit of the Post Office and would underpin the network to which we are all committed.

That is why I regret the confusion that has been created in recent times over the impact of ACT and the possible impact of privatisation. Those two issues ought to be considered separately, because our policy of encouraging ACT on a voluntary basis has been in place for some time —for 10 years or so—and we have yet to decide whether to privatise part or all of the Post Office. Whatever the outcome of the review, our commitment to a nationwide

[Mr. Hamilton]

network of post offices will not be compromised. There are ways to protect the network, whether it be in the public or the private sector, and also whatever services the Post Office provides.

I remind hon. Members, as did the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) in his speech, that 19,000 of the 20,000 post offices are already in the private sector, because all sub-post offices are run by individual entrepreneurs. They contract for their services with the Post Office, but the premises and the business itself are firmly in the private sector. That has been a great strength of the system.

The Post Office's programme of converting Crown offices to agency status has been successful in improving efficiency, with Post Office services having been transferred to the private sector. There is no inconsistency at all between the private sector option and the provision of services that hitherto were the responsibility of a nationalised institution. What matters is the Government's commitment to those services being available on a widespread and viable basis throughout the country. I am happy yet again to reaffirm that commitment.

Mr. Morley: There is still a great risk in privatising the core of a service such as the Post Office, which is in part publicly controlled but which, of course, has a private interest element—the contracting out of sub-post offices. I draw the Minister's attention to the privatisation of the electricity boards. Has he thought about the number of showrooms that have been closed as the electricity companies seek to maximise their revenue? We believe that, as well as having a duty to make a profit, the Post Office should provide a public service.

Mr. Hamilton: It is a little far-fetched to compare electricity showrooms with post offices. I do not therefore intend to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point, as only a couple of minutes are left to me.

We are considering in our review whether there are ways of organising all or part of Post Office business in such a way as to enable further gains to be made and the customer to have even better services while safeguarding our nationwide network commitment and our universal mail service obligation. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made it crystal clear—there was no ambivalence or ambiguity about it—that the two unbreakable commitments on the basis of which our Post Office review is predicated are, first, that a nationwide network of post offices and a universal postal delivery service at a uniform tariff will be preserved and, secondly, that our universal mail service obligation, whatever the outcome of the review, will be as it is now.

We are, however, seeking to improve efficiency in order to reduce costs. The consequence will be that money which is now wasted can be channelled into other more productive and socially useful services. That must be the objective and aim of us all in the debate. Nobody benefits from waste. We must seek to use scarce resources in ways that are most productive and that give the greatest satisfaction to consumers. That, of course, is the rationale for the existence of any business. We believe in striving constantly for improvements. If there is a way to improve the current arrangements, whether through privatisation or in any other way, we shall not shrink from making appropriate changes.

I hope that during this valuable and interesting debate I have been able to allay the fears of at least some hon. Members, though the experience of many years in politics inclines me to believe that such optimism is usually misplaced. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Western Isles and to all those who have participated in the debate for this opportunity to run over issues which are of such concern to our constituents. I look forward to seeing act 2 on Wednesday, when the ringmaster of the drama, as on this occasion, will be the hon. Member for Jarrow. On that——

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 May 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Suspect Package (Abingdon Street)

9.34 am

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has it been brought to your attention that a little while ago a suspect package was found in the area of Abingdon street, not far from the Palace of Westminster? I understand that traffic congestion in the area is severe. It is possible that there are hon. Members who have been unable to reach the Chamber until now and who I know will be anxious to take part in this morning's debate. Have you received any representations on the matter from any hon. Members? Would you consider perhaps adjourning the sitting for a while so that we can ensure that all interested hon. Members are here for the beginning of the debate?

Madam Speaker: I have been told about the suspect package and the chaos and disturbance that it caused. I have also been told on the best possible authority that the roads have been clear since 9.15 today and, therefore, I think that that gives ample time for hon. Members to be here by 9.30.

PETITION

Live Animals (Sales)

9.35 am

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I wish to present a petition, signed by 20,000 people, on behalf of my constituent, Mr. Alan Clark, of the group Puppywatch, which strongly objects

to the sale of puppies and other live animals through dealers, agents and third parties such as pet shops and other retail outlets.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House notes these objections and brings forward measures to prevent such sales.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE (ABOLITION OF NOT PROVEN VERDICT) (SCOTLAND)

Mr. George Robertson presented a Bill to abolish, in Scotland, the not proven verdict in criminal proceedings; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 July, and to be printed. [Bill 197.]

Orders of the Day

Noise and Statutory Nuisance Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered

Schedule 2

CONSENT TO THE OPERATION OF LOUDSPEAKERS IN STREETS OR ROADS

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 15, line 33, after 'loudspeaker', insert

'in connection with any election or'.—*[Mr. Hunter.]*

9.37 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I wish to speak briefly to the amendment as an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the legislation. I fear that the Bill is another example of the way in which the House should follow the maxim

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Indeed, that maxim should be above the doorway here in appropriate Latin.

Undoubtedly, this is a well-intentioned Bill. Clause 8 is well intentioned, schedule 2 is well intentioned, and the amendment is well intentioned. However, I shall speak against the amendment because it would impose on the enforcement authorities an added burden that they simply cannot be asked to carry at this stage.

I am astounded by the cavalier way in which the House is being invited to deal with this important legislation. I do not believe that it is sufficient for the House to rely on the discussion in another place to correct the mistakes that may be made here. Hon. Members will be aware that there was a brief Committee stage—I do not hold that against the Committee. Obviously, that shows that there is great support for the Bill's intentions, but no one can pretend that every aspect of the legislation was adequately discussed upstairs. Similarly, the House has the opportunity to listen to democratic representations from our constituents and those who are affected by the legislation that we seek to enact. The other place has a different role.

I do not believe that the amendment, the schedule, the clause and the Bill deserve such inadequate attention, on three grounds: first, definition; secondly, enforcement; and, thirdly, consequent cost to the councils and the police who will have the responsibility for enforcing the legislation. In case some hon. Members are here on a false pretence—perhaps they are interested in other Bills—I should point out that the amendment will have this effect. Clause 8 says that a local authority may resolve that schedule 2 will apply——

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): What does my hon. Friend mean by "false pretence"? I hope that he will bear in mind that many hon. Members are here as supporters of an important Bill, which is supported by a great many Liberal Democrat supporters in the west country.

Mr. Tyler: I understand the point made by my right hon. Friend, but I will not be lured into a discussion on the merits of another Bill because I am sure that Mr. Deputy Speaker would rule me out of order. Perhaps I could also

[Mr. Tyler]

remind my right hon. Friend that interventions take time. My speech is reasonably elastic. I have time to answer any interventions that may be made, but I hope to stick to the point. I shall do so much more succinctly if I have no interference or interventions from my hon. Friends, or, indeed, from other hon. Members.

Clause 8 provides:

"A local authority may resolve that Schedule 2 is to apply to its area."

Schedule 2(1)(2) says:

"A consent shall not be given to the operation of a loudspeaker for the purpose of advertising any entertainment, trade or business."

The amendment seeks to insert

"in connection with any election".

I am sure that you have read the report of the Committee proceedings, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was no real discussion of this point. There was no demand from members of the Committee that the Bill should be extended in that way. There was no preliminary discussion of the amendment.

Let me turn to the question of definition. What does "in connection with any election" mean? Let us take an example. Suppose the noble Lord Tebbit toured Newbury in recent weeks in a loudspeaker van prophesying hell-fire and damnation if the Maastricht treaty was ratified, and inviting residents to meet him in the salubrious surroundings of Newbury racecourse. If he did not promote the candidature of an individual, would he be exempt? Who is to say?

Let us take another example. If the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) deafened the streets of his constituency calling on his local authority to take action under his legislation, that would be political. But would it be in connection with any election? If it fell outside an election period, clearly it would not. What is his justification for that discrimination? Why should an election be inherently more objectionable and why should the noise that it perpetrates be controlled with more vigour than another political campaign at a different time of the year?

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I give way.

The hon. Gentleman seems to have had second thoughts.

Suppose the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) drove around Westminster or Pimlico extolling the virtues of his "Access to Accommodation Bill" either during or outside an election period. That would surely be exempt under the schedule as amended by amendment No. 1. Who is to say? Who will act as thought police following the loudspeakers and recording every word? Will they say, "He has mentioned a candidate, so he is speaking in connection with an election", or, "No, he is talking about the council tax", or, "He is talking about the water rates."? How can anyone distinguish between the two without monitoring everything that is said over the loudspeaker system?

On the subject of enforcement, if the House intends to place extra responsibilities on the shoulders of environmental health officers or the police, I plead with it to listen to what their representatives say about placing those added burdens on them. Already both are rightly resentful that they are being asked to achieve the impossible with regard to noise nuisance. The Government have not given them adequate resources. Local authorities are starved of funds for existing statutory obligations on noise. The Government and Parliament keep inventing and adding more obligations, but they provide no more resources.

The public are being encouraged to have unrealistic expectations. I represent a rural area. People who go to live in rural areas all too often expect a level of quietness and peace which is unrealistic. I give one example. In the *Western Morning News* we have had a succession of interesting reports about the case of Corky the cockerel. The judge decided that its crowing was an assault on the ears which seriously interfered with the sleep and comfort of its neighbours. As a result, there was a £25,000 court bill for Corky the cockerel.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I fully appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may be interested in the activities of Corky the cockerel, but does he accept that it seems to some of us that he is speaking at great length for no reason other than that he possibly wants to delay our reaching the next business? Given the allegation that he has contacts with the Shopping Hours Reform Council, I suspect that he is abusing the House in seeking to delay——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Chair will decide whether there is any abuse of the House.

9.45 am

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy speaker. I certainly do not intend to be lured into discussion of another issue.

If amendment No. 1 is passed, both the police and environmental health officers will be asked to encourage among the public an even greater expectation that every noise can be controlled. As in the case of the loudspeaker vans which are the subject of the amendment, subjective judgment will make all the difference.

What are we asking EHOs to do? Other hon. Members may have a different experience of their local authorities —perhaps the hon. Member for Basingstoke has—but my local authorities are already overworked. They have far too much responsibility in many areas and we should not add something that lacks definition and clarity and therefore relies on subjective judgment.

The law is already seen to be something of an ass on the subject of noise nuisance. In view of the anxiety of the hon. Member for Basingstoke to make progress, I shall not read the whole report, but a young mother has been warned by her local council to keep her teething baby quiet or face court and a fine of up to £5,000.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Tyler: A recent report said:

"Cannock Chase council 'noise pollution officers' issued the ultimatum to Jackie Whitehouse, 24, after neighbours complained that eight-month old Zoe was depriving them of sleep by crying through the night."

Did the hon. Gentleman want to intervene?

Mr. John Marshall: I merely wanted to find out which damn fool local authority had done that. I thank the hon. Gentleman for telling us.

Mr. Tyler: Enforcement costs a great deal of money. No precise figures have been given for the cost of introducing the Bill, with or without the amendment. But this confusing amendment will clearly add to that cost. The best estimate that has been made is that the cost to public funds

"will probably exceed £0·5 million."

It probably will.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman mentioned a court bill of £25,000 in the case of Corky the cockerel. It may be unusual for a Conservative Member to pray in aid the BBC, but Radio 4 went into the case of cockerels keeping people awake. It found that the solution was simply to raise the perch higher so that the cockerel could not get its head up to crow loudly. That would be a considerable saving on the £25,000 which the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Tyler: I had better not follow the hon. Gentleman's point too far because, unless the cockerel is in a loudspeaker van, it is not germane to the debate. I do not propose to crow on that subject any longer.

Organisations representing environmental health officers and the police are sceptical about the Bill. They feel that it imposes on them extra responsibilities without the clarity that they need to ensure that the cost is kept to a minimum. There is no evidence of which I am aware—I am sure that the Minister will respond to this point; I see that he is taking advice—that local authorities have asked for the amendment, the schedule or the clause.

The rapid introduction of the measures in the Bill will put a special strain on local authorities throughout Britain which have difficult budgetary decisions to take. I tabled an amendment to postpone the implementation of the Bill. It was not selected. However, I hope that the point will be recognised as a serious one about the way in which the legislation is drafted.

Local authorities may share my fears and may simply refuse to take up schedule 2, which will remain a dead letter on the statute book, with or without the amendment. If that were to happen, surely it is irresponsible for the House to pass something that is innocuous because we believe that it will be useless. Why are we being asked to pass the amendment on the nod? To adopt such an attitude to the Bill does no credit to the hon. Member for Basingstoke or to the House.

Today we are all Back Benchers; this is a Back-Bench day. This Back Bencher has grave misgivings about slipshod legislation, such as the Bill. It would be irresponsible of us to rely on the other place to correct our mistakes. The resulting cost and confusion of passing the Bill, as amended, whatever its good intentions, will be to the discredit of the House. It will also lead to confusion on the part of those who are asked to enforce our legislation.

A persistent rumour has circulated that the accelerated and abbreviated procedure adopted this morning is an attempt by those on the respective Front Benches to manipulate the House. I am a Back Bencher and I am not party to what the Whips may do, but I do not believe that it is right for Back Benchers to allow themselves to be bullied on a Friday by the Whips. I invite the hon. Member for Basingstoke to justify his amendment or to answer my questions and decide to withdraw it.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I deeply regret that contribution from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), which was largely irrelevant. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not studied the Bill, because the amendment would maintain the status quo.

The hon. Gentleman may be unaware that loudspeakers can be used during election campaigns between the hours of 8 am and 9 pm. That practice is continued under the Bill. It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman should wax so lyrical about an amendment which he has obviously not understood.

I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman said that the Bill has not been considered sufficiently. The Committee, which lasted the best part of a morning, considered 38 amendments in great detail.

I shall explain briefly the effect of the amendment. It will ensure that loudspeakers can be used during elections between the hours of 8 am and 9 pm, as is currently the practice.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I served on the Committee and I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has said.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall develop my argument first.

If the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has studied the *Official Report* of the proceedings of Standing Committee C, he will be aware that I had lengthy discussions with my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside about noise nuisance. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke assured the Committee that by the time the Bill returned to the Floor of the House, the concerns that had been raised in Committee would have been addressed.

Nearly every member of the Committee said that, from experience, he or she would be happy if the use of loudspeakers were outlawed during general elections. We all felt that we were more likely to lose votes if we used such loudspeakers.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall do so in a moment.

I am more than satisfied that my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, along with my hon. Friend the Minister, has addressed the concerns raised in the Committee.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Basingstoke have failed to address my point. I understand that the incumbent in a constituency might be only too pleased if one were not allowed to use loudspeakers during an election campaign, but the incumbent's interest is not always the same as that of the wider democracy. Neither of the hon. Members has taken up my key point about the distinction between

"in connection with any election"

and other political campaigning. I want to know how and why one should distinguish between the two.

Mr. Brown: We covered that point in Committee. We accepted that the use of loudspeakers in general elections was a special case, but hon. Members wanted to restrict their use on other occasions. I accept the restrictions that are imposed on the Bill and the specific circumstances for which we are legislating this morning.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 2, as amended, agreed to.

[Mr. Brown]

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Barry Field: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I invite you to leave the Chair for a moment and come down to my end of the Chamber, where you will observe that there is a footstool below the Mace? I wonder whether Madam Speaker has it in mind, later today, to confer some great honour of the House upon some hon. Member, as yet unknown. Perhaps the footstool has been placed there in readiness for that occasion. Can you enlighten the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot enlighten the hon. Gentleman.

Shops (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 14

POWER OF SECRETARY OF STATE TO AMEND PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

'.—(1) Subject to subsections (3) and (4) below, the Secretary of State may, by order made by statutory instrument, amend—

(a) the categories of shop exempt from the provisions of this Act under section 2 above;

(b) Schedule 2 to this Act (which relates to the categories of shop entitled to Class A registration);

(c) the classes of shop entitled to be registered under subsection (5) of section 3 above; and

(d) subsection (5) of section 3 above by substituting for the words "two hours", such longer period, not exceeding six hours as the Secretary of State may specify.

(2) An order under subsection (1) may also include such incidental, consequential, supplementary and transitional provisions as the Secretary of State may consider appropriate.

(3) No order shall be made under subsection (1) which (either alone or together with any other similar orders) would have the effect of exempting all shops, or substantially all shops, from the provisions of this Act.

(4) No order shall be made under subsection (1) unless a draft thereof has been laid before and approved by each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Ray Powell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.56 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: amendment (a) to the new clause, in line 15, leave out subsection (3).

New clause 10—*Extension of Classes of Registration*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument modify section 3 above by adding further classes under which shops may be registered or amending or removing any classes for the time being specified in that section.

(2) An order under this section makes such transitional, consequential or incidental provision (including provision modifying this Act or any other enactment) as the Secretary of State considers expedient in connection with the order.

(3) A statutory instrument containing an order under this section shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Powell: I recall that I was once promised an orange box, so perhaps the footstool to which the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) referred was brought in for me in the hope that, when I stood on it, at least I would be recognised by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and called to move my new clause. I am pleased that, at last, after 12 months, you have been able to catch my eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker and call me to speak. I am extremely grateful.

A point of order was raised earlier this morning about the cordoning off of Lambeth bridge and part of the Thames embankment. I was rather alarmed when my taxi was diverted from the House of Commons. I thought that perhaps it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Home Secretary to keep hon. Members from attending this important debate in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has declared a great interest.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Powell: Is it to do with Lambeth bridge?

Mr. Marshall: No; it is germane to the Bill.

Mr. Powell: But I have not started to discuss it yet. With all due respect, I was just about to start discussing my new clause, but first I want to wish you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a very good morning. Before I put my strong case for the new clause, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall).

Mr. Marshall: The answer to my question will be of great help to the House, the Minister and the country. Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether the Bill, as amended in Committee, is now the preferred option of the Keep Sunday Special campaign to the Bill that the Minister has promised to produce next month?

Mr. Powell: When hon. Members thoroughly examine the Bill, as amended in Committee, I hope that they will understand that if it receives its Third Reading before 2.30 pm and is then sent to the Lords, in all probability it will come back, as amended in the Lords, and be further considered. Numerous amendments and new clauses have been tabled. I am surprised that they were not tabled in Committee by the same Members who have tabled them today. I know that the hon. Member for Hendon, South is rather aggrieved that he did not serve on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill, but that was not entirely my fault, although I appointed all the hon. Members who served on the Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we have had sufficient preliminaries. Will the hon. Gentleman now come to the new clause, please?

10 am

Mr. Powell: It was not my intention to table any new clauses or further amendments for the Report stage of the Bill, which was not first, but second, in today's list. An attempt could have been made by a number of hon. Members, even Opposition Members, to filibuster on the previous Bill until about 2.30 pm to prevent further consideration of my Bill on Report. It was not the intention of any of my Bill's supporters to table any new clauses or amendments.

As someone who is innocent and trusting, even naive, I thought that very few amendments or new clauses would be tabled due to the efforts of my colleagues and me to ensure that the Committee represented the views of the Government and the Shopping Hours Reform Council. The majority of Government Members appointed to serve on the Committee had ample opportunity to submit new clauses and amendments to which the Committee could have given detailed consideration.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose*——

Mr. Powell: I shall not give way now.

I was appalled, disappointed, disillusioned and frustrated to find that those who had asked to be members of the Committee and who had opposing views found it necessary on Report to table 13 new clauses and 99 amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman come to the subject of the new clause?

Hon. Members: The hon. Gentleman is filibustering.

Mr. Powell: I am not filibustering. Hon. Members will be surprised at the shortness of my speech. I want to allow everyone else the opportunity to speak.

The new clause covers the wide aspects of the alternatives open to the House. I hope that later today the House will be given the opportunity to vote on the issues. The House must decide whether it agrees with the Government view of total deregulation or the Shopping Hours Reform Council's view of partial deregulation. It is important to discuss the other items on the agenda, so I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be tolerant and will allow me to develop my argument, which needs to be placed on record, if nothing else.

What hope did I, as a Back Bencher, have of presenting a Bill of such complexity and steering it to its Report stage? It was an achievement to pilot it through Committee, and I was able to bring it to its Report stage only with the help of devoted people from the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and other specialists. They have helped us to accomplish what we have achieved.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Powell: I shall give way in a minute as the hon. Gentleman made excellent contributions in Committee, and I give him credit for his regular attendance. He was particularly helpful in resolving a legal complexity in Committee, for which I am grateful. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but first I want to place on record some necessary remarks.

The new clause embraces the main issues being debated throughout the country by organisations, many of which have millions of pounds' worth of vested interests. Others, like myself, have a main interest in trying to keep Sunday special for as long as is humanly possible.

Mr. Fabricant *rose*——

Mr. Powell: I shall give way as I can see that the hon. Gentleman is becoming very frustrated.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman said that the Government have a particular view on Sunday trading, but would he not concede that the Government have no view? Individual Government Members may have a view, but the Government have no view and will be offering free choice. The hon. Gentleman also said that we had the opportunity to discuss the subject fully in Committee, but would he not concede that, of 21 members of the Committee, barely two or three are actually deregulationists?

Mr. Powell: I am surprised: the hon. Gentleman is more naive than I if he thinks that the Government do not have a view on the matter. The Home Secretary and a number of other Ministers have shown that they are in favour of total deregulation. Therefore, it is important to give the new clause serious consideration.

I stayed awake by my telephone most of the night thinking that, after so many U-turns in the House since last Thursday, there might be another one and I would receive a telephone call from the Home Secretary to say that he had changed his mind and was prepared to give my Bill a free wind and perhaps even help it be placed on the statute book. When the House considers the new clause, I hope that we shall vote and decide that it is high time that

[Mr. Powell]

the Shops Act 1950 was altered. I hope that my Bill will be enacted, so that instead of the present state of limbo we can protect those people who need it—small shopkeepers who are being exploited as a result of the big five being allowed to violate the law, open on Sunday and profit from it.

I read an article in yesterday's *Daily Mail* on Sainbury's profits. David Sainsbury said that part of the profits had accrued as a result of trading on Sunday—[HON. MEMBERS: "Illegally. "] Yes, illegally. Not many of the big stores are legally entitled to trade on Sunday. David Sainsbury admitted frankly that Sainsbury was trading illegally and gained extra profits as a result.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to the hon. Gentleman to address his remarks to the new clause. I have been very tolerant with him, but he has strayed rather far from it.

Mr. Powell: Perhaps if I were to read out the new clause that would be the best solution to the dilemma facing you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It reads:

' .—(1) Subject to subsections (3) and (4) below, the Secretary of State may, by order made by statutory instrument, amend—

(a) the categories of shop exempt from the provisions of this Act under section 2 above;

(b) Schedule 2 to this Act (which relates to the categories of shop entitled to Class A registration);

(c) the classes of shop entitled to be registered under subsection (5) of section 3 above; and

(d) subsection (5) of section 3 above by substituting for the words "two hours", such longer period, not exceeding six hours as the Secretary of State may specify.

(2) An order under subsection (1) may also include such incidental, consequential, supplementary and transitional provisions as the Secretary of State may specify.

(3) No order shall be made under subsection (1) which (either alone or together with any other similar orders) would have the effect of exempting all shops, or substantially all shops, from the provisions of this Act.

(4) No order shall be made under subsection (1) unless a draft thereof has been laid before and approved by each House of Parliament.'.

If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, analyse what I have been saying, you will find that it was all relevant to the new clause that I have read out to the House, even though it is a highly technical clause.

I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members gathered here this morning will have been able to follow and understand the provisions of the new clause far more quickly than I could when I first read it. I am sure that they are all cleverer than I am; they know exactly what it means, how it affects the Bill and how it will bear on the votes to be taken later today.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): In a constituency such as mine—if I may be so impertinent, I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is the Isle of Wight—we regularly play host to yacht races that come across the channel and across other long distances. Those yachts are regularly delayed by heavy weather, such as gales, and local chandleries stay open so that the crews can make their purchases and repair their breakages. If I understand the new clause correctly, it would require the Secretary of State to have the powers of the Almighty to be able to predict when such heavy weather might take place in the channel, so that he could then prescribe the opening hours for the chandleries in the Isle of Wight in advance.

At present we are covered by the exemptions in the law, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to put his mind to this point, because it worries my constituents.

10.15 am

Mr. Powell: The hon. Gentleman's point is not relevant to the new clause, but regulations under the Bill would allow for the problem of special exemptions. The last thing that I or the sponsors of the Bill want is to subject the hon. Gentleman's constituents to restrictions. He represents a lovely area where people enjoy their regattas. The Isle of Wight does have occasional bad weather—but not as much as we get in Wales. We have no desire to curtail the enjoyment of people in the Isle of Wight or of those who visit the area. The Bill provides for resort areas and for towns that are frequented by visitors. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have looked after his constituents' interests in preparing the Bill.

I believe that all hon. Members who may be called to speak in today's debates should declare their financial interest if they have one. Quite a number of them have a direct interest in the businesses that we specify in the Bill. As for me, I proudly declare my interest: it is my true belief that we desperately need to keep Sunday a special day in this country. The new clause attempts to do just that. Crime is on the increase. We desperately need to keep one day of the week different from the other six working days.

I should like to read out a letter from a Mrs. Hilda Stevens:

"I have just found your address in my parish magazine. I am 87 years old and nearly housebound, but Sunday has been a special day all my life and I hope it is not too late for me to send you a little help."

The letter is signed by Mrs. Stevens, who enclosed a £10 cheque to help the Keep Sunday Special campaign.

I was impressed by that lady's generosity—no doubt £10 represents a great deal for someone of 87. She has obviously kept Sunday a special day all her life, and throughout the country most families keep Sunday a special day when they can get together, the grandchildren can visit the grandparents, and people can have a day of rest.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, psychologically, millions of people need a day to recharge their batteries as well as for religious purposes? Is he aware, though, that many of my constituents are concerned, because their day of rest, of religious reflection and of pause in the hurly burly of the working week is Saturday because of their Jewish faith? Is he confident that the Bill, as amended in Committee, would take care of those anxieties and would allow Jewish shops to be open on a Sunday?

Mr. Powell: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Committee gave careful consideration to the Jewish problem. I am entirely satisfied that it is comprehensively covered in one of the amendments tabled for consideration today. It is fully in accord with what the Jewish people wanted. In Committee, I spoke at great length on that subject when moving a new clause, but we found that it had to be amended, so we withdrew it. I know that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has tabled a new clause on the subject. I consulted one of the

appropriate officers of the Jewish people only this week to ensure that the interests of the Jewish people are fully covered and that they are not left out, and they submitted amendments for Report.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Sales of wet fish on a Sunday—which are permitted under the 1950 Act—are a matter of vital interest to Grimsby. My hon. Friend gave undertakings in Committee that such sales would be allowed under the Bill. How will that commitment be fulfilled? Is it fulfilled by the new clause?

Mr. Powell: If we have a vote on the three major issues, I am sure that the clause can be inserted and amendments can be inserted into the Bill as it stands.

I have spoken of my interest in keeping Sunday special. One of my other interests is——

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has said that new amendments can be added to the Bill today. I concede that I have been a Member of Parliament for only 13 months and that I am inexperienced, but is that correct? Can new amendments be added over and above those already on the amendment paper?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. Before I call the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) to resume his speech, let me yet again draw his attention to the fact that he has been speaking at some length, but much of what he has said goes outside the new clause. I know that he has tried, and he has read out the new clause, but he is still straying rather wide.

Mr. Powell: I am guided by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we all are, but I thought that the new clause was comprehensive. It covers all aspects of the Bill. I am sorry if I have strayed.

An important point of the Bill that would also be affected by the new clause is that giving employment protection to employees in Scotland. Shops have been opening on Sundays in Scotland for many years, but there has been no such protection for employees. Of all the available options, that is the only one which would offer employees protection.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Powell: Wait a minute. If the hon. Gentleman is not popping up to make interventions, he is popping up to make points of order. He should let the hon. Member who is promoting the Bill have a chance. Let me pay tribute to the deputy general secretary of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and others who have assisted in attempts to ensure that the Bill provides employment protection.

The Committee considered three major contentious issues—DIY stores, garden centres, and the size of convenience stores. The new clause incorporates the views expressed on those issues. It includes a new class of registration, a wider range of tourist shops, registration provisions and definition of shops that was revised to limit the number of services regulated by the Bill.

The Committee considered all the issues and hon. Members were rightly disturbed to find on the amendment paper so many new clauses and amendments. We feel that it is an attempt to stop the Bill having a Third Reading so that it can go on to the House of Lords for further amendment. How does any hon. Member think that a Bill of this magnitude could start its Report stage at 10 o'clock on a Friday and finish at 2.30 with the House having debated 13 new clauses and 135 amendments? It would be impossible. Those who have tabled the new clauses and amendments know that.

The new clause allows the House to decide whether it wants complete deregulation, shopping hours reform proposals or the Bill as greatly amended in Committee and presented here this morning. I hope that all hon. Members will consider the issues involved and give the Bill a fair wind so that it can go on to the other place. When it comes back, I hope that it will be further considered in time given by the Government so that the question of Sunday trading can be resolved properly by the House.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Unfortunately, I was not a member of the Committee. Is my hon. Friend saying that the Committee gave long and detailed consideration to the issues in the Bill, but that, even so, all the new clauses and amendments have been tabled as a deliberate attempt to block progress on an important social issue?

Mr. Powell: I agree with my hon. Friend, who represents the neighbouring constituency to mine—indeed, the constituency that I represented in 1983. I am glad that he has made that point, which emphasises and repeats mine, because it is necessary not only for hon. Members but those outside who might be listening to realise and appreciate how easy it is to filibuster and spoil private Members' Bills.

I am sure that in our deliberations today we shall consider the consequences of what happened last Thursday. We shall consider the message delivered by the Prime Minister about curbing arrogance. I am sure that all hon. Members will try to appreciate that we need a new amended Shops Act to deal with Sunday trading. The vehicle for achieving that is available this morning for all hon. Members to vote on. If hon. Members give it proper consideration, without bias or selfishness, the Bill will proceed to the Lords.

10.30 am

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): This is a useful new clause, although its drafting is complex. It presents three options, which the Government have said that they, too, will present in due course. Subsection (3) states:

"No order shall be made under subsection (1) which . . . would have the effect of exempting all shops"—

that is the total deregulation formula. Voting for amendment (a) would make that part of our future Sunday trading arrangements: a majority in favour of the amendment would clearly constitute a majority in favour of full deregulation. We should then know where we stood. If the amendment were disallowed, we should at least know that the majority did not want full deregulation.

As it stands, new clause 14 incorporates, in outline, many of the suggestions of the Shopping Hours Reform Council, including the substitution of six hours for two hours. If the new clause—with or without amendment (a)—were opposed, that would suggest that the House broadly preferred the Bill in its present form.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to choose between the three options in the new clause. Would not it be tantalising for everyone concerned, not least the Government's business managers, if the House were able—on a single Friday before the Whitsun recess—to decide a matter so controversial that, were the Government to

[Mr. Michael Alison]

present their own legislation in the autumn next year, it would involve a lengthy process of Second Reading, Committee and so forth, with several late-night sittings? This measure has a convenience-package factor in that it involves hours of debate, rather than whole days and nights.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Alison: Of course I will give way to my hon. Friend, to whom I gave way frequently in Committee.

Mr. Fabricant: I appreciate my right hon. Friend's courtesy, as I did in Committee.

Surely my right hon. Friend is not suggesting that the House could make such a decision today, given the small number of hon. Members present. It being a Friday, many hon. Members are in their constituencies. Will not the real test come in the next Session of Parliament when, we hope, the matter will be given Government time?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend usually prefaces his interventions with "I am a very new boy in the House", or "I am not very familiar with the way things work here, but—". I am sorry that he did not do so on this occasion, for his intervention reflects his inexperience. He cannot understand what really happens on Fridays if he believes that the number of hon. Members present now represents the number who will appear from the highways and byways, the chambers and television rooms, to pour through the Lobbies.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Alison: I had better make progress. If my hon. Friend wishes to correct me on a factual point, I am happy to stand corrected without even hearing what he has to say.

A certain precondition is inherent in our attempt to crowd all the essential decisions that the Government want us to make into a single Friday sitting. The Bill may be amended further in the House of Lords; as it stands, however—having been amended in Committee—is it yet mature enough, albeit not perfect, for the House to be able to decide whether to go for full deregulation, to insert the variation suggested by the Shopping Hours Reform Council or to leave the Bill in its present form? I believe that it is mature enough and has been sufficiently amended.

I hope that this will not be taken as a personal attack, but I must draw attention to a feature of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), who was a valued member of the Standing Committee. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I note that my view is shared by those who were not on the Committee. My right hon. Friend suffers from a rare parliamentary malady—particularly rare among Front Benchers. She is addicted to amendments. What moth holes are to moths, what rabbit holes are to rabbits, amendments are to my right hon. Friend: she cannot have too many of them.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden) *rose*—

Mr. Alison: I have not yet finished my devastating attack on my right hon. Friend; let me develop it further.

My right hon. Friend put her name to 200 amendments in Committee and there must be 90 or 100 on the amendment paper today. Hon. Members may point out that she was a Minister for many years and has spent most of her parliamentary life resisting amendments; that, however, is no proof that she is not an addict. Many a schoolmistress has confiscated crisps and sweets in class, in order to devour them when the bereft children have gone home. I can tell the House in confidence that, if it were possible by a flick of a magic wand to substitute for this Bill one of my right hon. Friend's Criminal Justice Acts —she presented several in earlier days—she would cover the amendment paper with amendments to it. It would be instinctive. Indeed, this illness of hers—this addiction to amendments—has spilled over, and now affects her erstwhile Front-Bench colleague, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. He, too, has now caught the habit. He cannot resist amendments. Amendments are to be tabled in the other place to the current Criminal Justice Bill. The addiction of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden for amendments should be borne in mind when I outline the important amendments that have already been made to make the Bill a mature Bill.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I was much amused by my right hon. Friend's choice of words when expressing his views about the number of amendments that stand in my name on the amendment paper. Does he agree that it is just as well that Members of Parliament who hold the same views as I were in favour of some of the motions that were before the House earlier this parliamentary Session? I hope that my right hon. Friend can imagine the consequences of extending our debates on this Bill even further than those that we had on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. On a more serious note, I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that it is important that this Bill, which is complex and difficult and which has caused so much distress to a large number of people, should be as near perfect as we can possibly make it and that that is the reason for the amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must point out that those hon. Members whose interventions are lengthy and who also expect to catch my eye later will find that long interventions are taken into consideration.

Mr. Alison: Thank goodness I am on my feet, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall apply that principle to myself and will not take too long.

My hon. Friend is right and how grateful I am to her that she did not table a large number of amendments to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. That, of course, shows that for the alcoholic—my right hon. Friend is far from that, but I use the word just as a metaphor —there is selectivity about one's particular tipple. Mercifully, my right hon. Friend's tipple is not the Maastricht Bill, but the Shops (Amendment) Bill.

Let me refer to some of the improvements that were made in Committee, in response to some of the amendments that my right hon. Friend tried to table. The size restriction for the main category of smaller shops authorised to open has been doubled from 1,500 to 3,000 ft—about the size of the Central Lobby. Sweeping improvements for the opening of Jewish shops have been accepted. Do-it-yourself shops have been enfranchised for Sunday opening, whereas earlier they were excluded.

Garden centres and farm shops can now not only open but can open to sell the full range of their goods. The self-assessment or registration procedures for smaller shops opening on Sundays, as originally proposed in the Bill, are now, thanks to what has been said by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), to be drastically revised and simplified. No statistical measure of turnover will be called for.

All these amendments, and others, have been made or tabled not only to assuage my right hon. Friend's addiction but to produce a moderate, reasonable and viable Bill. Moderation, viability and reasonableness are the hallmarks of the Bill.

I must ask right hon. and hon. Members to reflecct for a moment on the significance of the fact that the Shops Act 1950 is well over 40 years old and that serious efforts over many years to amend or replace a 43-year-old Shops Act have been unsuccessful and unrequited. The House, successive Governments of all parties and the country at large have in effect demonstrated that they are comfortable with the old ways. Like an old but comfortable coat or pair of shoes, or even an old house, we are loth to change or discard something that works and suits us, even though it could be amended and perhaps made slightly better.

It is not the sabbatarian religious fanatics who want to keep Sunday special. It is the eastender who wants a day off, as well as many millions of others, of every class and background. The traditional, quietish and different character of Sunday has wide appeal. There may be scope for a little bit of make-do-and-mend with the Shops Act, but it is the wild-eyed fanatics of commercial activism, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden and my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who is the most fanatically and commercially minded of them all, who are the true revolutionaries. What they want, essentially, is a change to complete deregulation—a change as sweeping as the execution of royalty in the French revolution.

10.45 am

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I appreciate that my right hon. Friend has not singled me out for one of his extremely charming ways of insulting people, but does he accept that some of us are in the House this morning on behalf of our constituents who have indicated, in opinion poll after opinion poll by a margin of 70 per cent., that they would like to be able to shop on Sundays and who demonstrate every Sunday that they want to shop on Sunday by going and doing just that? That is why some of us are here to talk about the issue. While I am on my feet, can I say that I should have liked to talk in Committee but that I was prevented——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. It looks as though the hon. Gentleman and others who have intervened are continuing the Second Reading debate. I hope, therefore, that the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) will speak to the new clause.

Mr. Alison: I am sorry that I have lured my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), whom I would only ever want to help, into making an intervention that may have damaged his prospects of speaking in the debate. Let me remind him, however, that public opinion polls have a tatty and disreputable past. I do not believe that we need to think too much about them.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind the rights of the people who have to work in order to cater for those who want to shop on Sunday? Have they no rights to be protected?

Mr. Alison: They are, I believe, overwhelmingly the silent majority.

If we do not pass the Bill, amended or unamended, today, and reach the stage of full or partial deregulation, I do not deny that there will be a switch to Sunday shopping. It will probably be a substantial switch, but that will be the manifestation not of a pent-up demand for Sunday shopping but of the secondary importance and postponability of shopping. The possibility of Sunday shopping means that we can do things that we care about more, such as tiddly winks or boules, on days and at times that are put in front of shopping and that we postpone shopping until Sunday because shopping is not important to us.

The essential postponability of shopping will lead to a switch to Sunday shopping, but what virtually every expert expects is that if there is widespread Sunday opening, costs will rise. No more goods, overall, will be sold. There will be merely a switch from shopping on other days of the week. Volumes will remain static. Prices will go up and retailing jobs will go down. Everybody—the silent majority to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred, the shop workers and the general public—will be disadvantaged.

I hope that we do not agree the amendments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden. I hope that we shall settle, here and now, for the option that we prefer. My advice to the House is to stick to the old ways.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I shall not speak at great length and will conclude as quickly as I can out of regard for others who want to speak to the new clause.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has proved that his word is his bond. On Second Reading on 22 January, he promised to give sympathetic consideration to every constructive amendment moved in Committee. That promise was kept. Many significant amendments were approved, notably the increase to 3,000 sq ft in the size of shop allowed to open, and we now have a Bill that is the first serious attempt to reform the Sunday trading law in a sensible and practical way. While liberalising the 1950 Act, the Bill respects the special nature of Sunday and is the best possible means of tackling a mess that has become messier month by month.

In declaring my interest in the debate—I have the honour to be sponsored by the Co-operative movement—I again declare my pride in being an upholder here of a trading concept that is among the most admirable this country ever gave to the world.

By tabling the new clause, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore has gone further than his promise on Second Reading in responding positively to amendments in Committee. He has accepted the Government's wish to offer right hon. and hon. Members three options for reforming the law: first total deregulation; secondly, the Shopping Hours Reform Council's plan for partial deregulation; and, thirdly, what the Bill proposes. The

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

Government's intention was to allow the House to vote on the three options in the autumn, possibly in November, but my hon. Friend's initiative in tabling the new clause makes it possible for us to decide the issue in this debate. That will be very widely welcomed outside the House by a public who have grown weary of the policy of dither, delay and drift. I support my hon. Friend's initiative and hope that the House will do so by an emphatic majority when we vote on the new clause.

It is no secret that each of the three options which this debate is addressing has its supporters in the Cabinet. The Home Secretary, for example, favours deregulation, the Heritage Secretary and others support variations of the SHRC plan and the Employment Secretary, among others, wants what the Bill proposes. What should unite them all, however, and every other right hon. and hon. Member, is a determination to resolve the issue now, and that is what my hon. Friend's ingenious new clause makes possible.

There is no reason whatever why we should delay until the autumn a decision that we can take today. What makes it extremely urgent to decide and to legislate now is the issue of law and order. The Government are said to be deeply concerned by the extent of public discontent with their failure to cope with increasing lawlessness in Britain today. Let me give them one reason for that discontent. Everyone knows that lawbreaking on Sunday trading by retailers is totally out of hand. Not only is the law debased but Parliament itself is demeaned by some very rich people who regard themselves as being above the law and, by implication, are contemptuous of those who make and work to uphold the law.

The chairmen of major plcs now blatantly ignore the law because it does not suit them. They will not be able to do so if the purpose of the new clause is achieved, as I hope it will be at the conclusion of the debate. I refer to people such as Sir Ian MacLaurin, David Sainsbury and Sir Geoffrey Mulcahy. A spokesman for Tesco apparently did not see the irony of his recent comment with reference to graffiti and damaged fences at one of Tesco's superstore developments when he said:

"Breaking the law is not the way to protest."

That is what this House must tell him today. Many much poorer people who fail to pay their poll tax wonder why the chairman of a plc is allowed to break the law but they are put in prison for doing so.

Lawbreaking on today's massive scale is creating unfair competition between large retailers. That is why the new clause is so important. Those who break the law are stealing market share from their law-abiding competitors. David Sainsbury publicly admitted this week that this accounted for part of his profit. He might as well have said that part of his profit was due to stealing. Waitrose, which is part of the John Lewis Partnership, is losing £1 million a week of turnover for obeying the law. How can we allow that to go on for month after month when we have the chance today to update the law and stop lawbreaking?

The Prime Minister is said to be speaking to Scottish Conservatives today about the explosion in crime and the need for better law and order.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: Very briefly; I said that I want to conclude quickly.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Marks and Spencer, too, is losing a lot of money. It has good proposals that differ only in the smallest possible way from the new clause. It is to be commended for keeping the law.

Mr. Morris: What Marks and Spencer is saying is taken into account by the new clause, which allows the House to take a decision today that should not be deferred for six more months. I agree with the hon. Lady that we must look carefully and sympathetically at every proposal that is before us. Most of all, we must act quickly.

I was saying that I understand that the Prime Minister is addressing Scottish Conservatives today on the need for better law and order. Many people will think that, instead, he should be here at Westminster to vote for law and order by supporting the new clause on the good old principle that action speaks louder than words.

Lawbreaking on Sunday trading is resulting in many small shops being driven over the edge into bankruptcy. Even loss of between 5 and 10 per cent. is often enough to cause a small corner or village shop to go from profit to loss. Corner shops and small village shops situated near super-stores are losing vital turnover. They are bleeding to death from this haemorrhage of their businesses, yet I am sure that every hon. Member wants these small shops to be able to trade legally on Sunday with their entire range of goods. The recent London Economics report concluded that Sunday trading would greatly increase the pressure on small shops. Again, how can we allow such extensive lawbreaking to go on day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, when it is making life so wretched for smaller retailers?

Hugo Young, writing in *The Guardian* on 4 May, highlighted how inappropriate it is that some of the large companies that are breaking the law are also major contributors to the funds of one political party. These companies

"are breaking the law every Sunday and not even Mr. Gummer has been heard to utter the Phillipic appropriate to a law and order party. In fact Ministers have been blandly silent. When it suits politics, every Minister becomes an accomplice to the degrading of law."

No fewer than 256 Members of the House have signed an early-day motion demanding that

"Major national retailers set an example by closing their stores on Sundays in observance of the rule of law and in recognition of the sovereignty of Parliament."

The issue now is whether Parliament makes the laws in this country or whether the overmighty will be allowed to defy the will of Parliament. It will be quite intolerable for the Bill to be yet another victim of organised filibustering. If that happens, there will be widespread anger among people who are sick and tired of lawbreaking by the rich and powerful. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore on the new clause and I commend its purpose most warmly to the House.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I wish to speak to new clause 10 and I hope very much that we shall be able to have a separate debate on it. I do not wish to pursue the arguments about new clause 14. I suspect that a number of hon. Members believe that new clause 10 sits more appropriately with the spirit of the long title of the Bill; I am not so convinced that new clause 14 does so.

I have no wish other than to make the Bill perfect and that is why I have tabled amendments. I genuinely believe that the amendments that my hon. Friends and I have tabled will be beneficial to the general appearance of the Bill. However, the timing and placing of new clause 14 is a little suspect, so it would be better for us to concentrate on the proposals in new clause 10, which to a certain extent addresses some of the problems that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was trying to tackle.

The key point to new clause 10 is to consider the extension of classes of registration, in order to broaden the Bill. The new clause would allow the Secretary of State to remedy oversights in the legislation and to close loopholes, and we need to consider that idea carefully. I suspect that if the sponsors of the Bill were trying to translate their long title, it would fall into roughly the following phraseology: "This Bill closes shops on Sundays except those that sell goods and services that contribute to four main areas." The four areas named have always been recreation, emergencies, social gathering and travel, as advocated by the REST proposals. Those of us who served on the Committee, and greatly enjoyed the experience, those of us who paid a great deal of attention and were grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore for being flexible and for accepting many of the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends and by me, accept that it is incredibly difficult to identify those areas exactly and to specify the shops, products and recreations simply by listing them, as the Bill tries to do.

We welcomed, for example, the acceptance of the principle of allowing do-it-yourself shops to open on Sundays. But why only DIY shops? What is wrong with second-hand bookshops, which represent just as much of a recreation for many of us? I shall not take up too much of the time of the House, but I shall use one example to illustrate the difficulties involved in trying to identify by shop exactly how one can provide for recreation. I rest my case on that principle.

11 am

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): My right hon. Friend is right. The moment we start listing, we get into a legislative mess. For example, the Bill proposes that a shop registered under class B will be permitted to sell live tropical fish. Will a shopkeeper be prosecuted if he sells a goldfish? That is the sort of mess that will be created if trading standards officers interpret the legislation aggressively, and that is the sort of prosecution that we shall see.

Dame Angela Rumbold: To prevent such confusion is the very purpose of the new clause. It would give the Secretary of State the power to deal with those loopholes and omissions and to say, for very good reason, "Yes, we forgot that loophole and we shall deal with it."

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I shall point out to the right hon. Lady that there is a rationale behind the approach in the Bill. It is to keep open the shops that men use and keep closed the shops that women use, so that they will stay behind and do the cooking for us, for when we get home.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I am sure that if the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) reflects on the purport of what he just said, he will realise what a sexist remark that was. None the less, I assure him that I should prefer to cook on a Sunday than to shop. As everyone knows, I have frequently declared my dislike of shopping every day of the week, and Sunday is no exception.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the comments of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) were probably heavily influenced by an article that appeared in *The Independent* yesterday, saying that male Members of Parliament were prejudiced because they allowed shops for the boys to be open on a Sunday? However, the article, which was written by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), was rather wrongly illustrated with a photograph of both a man and a woman leaving a DIY shop carrying DIY products.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of the article in *The Independent*, which I have read. Perhaps my hon. Friend should see my daughter going to pick up the cement on a Sunday, and then he would recognise that she is one of the members of my family who not only does it herself but makes DIY purchases at a time convenient for her. She is a busy full-time worker so, unfortunately, she has to choose Sundays on which to do her shopping. It should be her right to do that.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Does my right hon. Friend agree that although some politicians cannot walk and chew gum at the same time, most women, being infinitely more flexible, can certainly shop and cook on the same day, so the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is unlikely to be disappointed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can see no way of differentiating between male and female in either of the new clauses that we are considering.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply trying to re-emphasise the point made by new clause 10, which gives the Secretary of State the power to add new classes of shop to the Bill. That is an important power, which we should not deny the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Will the right hon. Lady correct the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who referred to tropical fish? He was clearly misreading the Bill, probably mischievously. All that is mentioned in connection with tropical fish is the fact that they can be part of the principal goods sold, which must amount to 80 per cent. of the trade. Any other kind of product, including coldwater fish, can be sold as part of the remaining 20 per cent. Please let us not have misrepresentation.

Hon. Members: It is a red herring.

Dame Angela Rumbold: The hon. Lady has made her point, although I am not sure whether it has been well taken by my hon. Friends.

Another principle introduced by new clause 10 is the importance of keeping the law up to date. We have all seen what has happened to the Shops Act 1950, and we all know that it has been exceedingly difficult to try to introduce a new Act. My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), like other hon. Members, said that there had been no opportunity to change the law, but I suspect that in 1986, when the Home Secretary of the day tried to introduce deregulation, my right hon. Friend

[Dame Angela Rumbold]

probably chose to vote against it. It was his right to do so, but it would be incorrect to leave the House with the impression that there had been no genuine attempt by the Government to change the 1950 Act.

That Act was introduced a long time ago, and many people simply fail to recognise the huge social changes that have taken place since then. I shall not make a sexist remark, but I suspect that some hon. Members would like us to go back to the 1950s. Unfortunately for them, they cannot take us back there. It is important to remember that in 1950 only 26 per cent. of married women went to work, whereas 61 per cent. now do so. Those women have an equal right to make choices about the way in which they conduct the rest of their lives. One of the most important things that they have to do is to decide how to conduct their lives in concert with the needs of their working lives and of their families. The Bill would deprive those women of that opportunity. Therefore, it is important that we examine the exact extent of the deprivation that the Bill would impose on many women.

Mr. Burns: May I make again to my right hon. Friend the point that I made in Committee, because it is as relevant now as it was then? It is a red herring to flog to death the argument that, because of changes in the way in which society goes about its business, women cannot shop except on a Sunday and that shops have to be open on a Sunday because women are working. As I said in Committee, my wife is no different from the wives of many hon. Members. She has a full-time job and she has to look after two young children, yet she can easily do food and non-food shopping during the week and on Saturdays without needing the law to give her time to do shopping on Sundays because she cannot find any other time. It is a question of organisation rather than of changing social patterns.

Dame Angela Rumbold: That comment outlines precisely the objection to the Bill of many working women who have to work and to look after families. The Bill simply does not recognise the difficulties that women face. It is perfectly all right to say that women can arrange their lives so that they can do the shopping on Saturday, leaving them free to do housework and to cook lunch on Sunday. However, let us remember that women have just as much right to have a day when they can pursue recreational activities and it does not need to be Sunday. Why must the House declare that Sunday is the one day on which women can choose to take their time off?

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): What will the right hon. Lady say to women who will be forced to work on Sundays as a result of the deregulation that she favours?

Dame Angela Rumbold: We shall come later to some important amendments that deal with the protection of people who may have to work on Sunday. A number of women choose to work on Sunday and I should like to know what would happen to them.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): Does the right hon. Lady agree that many women value the opportunity to work on Sundays? In my constituency there are women who do not want to abandon their children to child minders during the week. They can work in the local Asda in Rawtenstall on a Sunday while their husbands care for their children and they can earn some much-needed income for the family. It suits them very well.

I remind the right hon. Lady of the letter that I read out in Committee from a women who works in a B and Q store on a Sunday and who receives double time for that. She says at the end of her letter:

"I believe in God and I believe he knows that I am doing the best for my family."

Dame Angela Rumbold: The hon. Lady has expressed the point far more perfectly than I could. It is not only because of this issue that we want new clause 10 to be inserted in the Bill. New clause 10 leads us to future proofing, to use engineering terminology, on a number of other issues. It would allow the law to be changed when there was public demand for change without the necessity of going through the difficult and time-consuming process of introducing legislation. No hon. Member, including the promoter and the sponsors of the Bill, wants the lengthy debate and agonising that we have gone through in past years over the introduction of legislation to replace the Shops Act 1950. It is clear that the issue raises enormous and intense emotional concerns. We want on the statute book, therefore, legislation that is sufficiently flexible and that will allow Parliament to make decisions, about Sunday trading and about people's ability to use Sundays in the way that they wish, which are in concert with the time, the place and the year.

Mr. Alison: I have looked with great interest at new clause 10 and I am listening with rapt attention to what my right hon. Friend is saying about it. If new clause 10 were accepted, should we then not have to worry about any further amendments in the House of Commons? Could the Bill, with the inclusion of new clause 10, ride through to Third Reading and be amended in the House of Lords? Would it then represent the flexible and adaptable regime that my right hon. Friend has expounded? If so, and if, on condition that new clause 10 were accepted, my right hon. Friend would encourage us to go through to Third Reading and to allow the Bill to go to the House of Lords, many of us would look sympathetically at new clause 10.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. There are a number of amendments today on which we should like to take the view of the House, as is perfectly legitimate on Report. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for saying that he might be able to support new clause 10. It is a step forward for those of us who would like greater flexibility and an extension of the powers given in the Bill. We should like to have a vote on new clause 10.

11.15 am

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for his hard work on the Bill and I also praise the hard work done by the Keep Sunday Special campaign and by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and other hon. Members who worked hard to get the Bill through its Committee stage and to produce what many people felt was a satisfactory solution to the problems of Sunday trading.

I regret that the Government have not got on with their task rather more quickly. It is sad that the Government are still talking about bringing three Bills before the House and giving the House a choice some time next year although, for the past 18 months or so, many people have broken the law. The Government should give a far more vigorous lead in trying to decide which option is best.

I have a great deal of sympathy for my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, who was faced by many amendments. As they were grouped, we could have had 35 or 36 Divisions. We could have spent nine hours simply voting on all the amendments before there was any discussion. It was sensible of my hon. Friend to table new clause 14, which has at least ensured that today's debate has taken account of some of the important issues that underlie the Bill and has avoided the whole Friday being given up to going over the minutiae of the Bill as hon. Members who did not want it to progress talked at great length.

Having done that, we must address ourselves to the crucial issues raised by new clause 14. The House must address the important question whether it is appropriate to deal with the detail of the Bill through regulations. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) addressed that point in new clause 10. I have a great deal of unease about regulations because they take power away from the House of Commons in terms of legislation and hand it to Ministers in the form of regulations. Legislation can be amended line by line and it is not easy to get through good things and bad things in a package. We have all seen how easy it is to put together a package of regulations and to persuade the House to support a regulation because although it does not like some things in it, it likes others. It is a little dangerous to go along the line of regulations.

However, I accept that the details of Sunday trading and changing customs and practices raise the problem of having to keep legislating. One reason why Sunday trading is now in such a mess is that the primary legislation has not been easy to amend by regulation and so has been unable to adapt. There is a problem for the House. Is it better to deal with the matter by primary legislation or by having an enabling Act and many regulations? I think that there is a case for dealing with Sunday trading by regulations. However, if we do so, we must keep the major safeguards with the House.

One of the attractions of new clause 14 is that any regulation would be subject to an affirmative resolution. New clause 10 would simply involve a prayer and we know how difficult it is even to get prayers debated and voted on. I go further and suggest to the Minister that if the Government are considering including regulations in any of their three options on Sunday trading, they should go for affirmative resolutions to change regulations and they should make the regulations amendable. That is not often done, although it was done in respect of regulations under the census legislation. The adoption of such a course would allow the House of Commons to retain a certain amount of power over the regulations, but would also give us considerable flexibility.

A second issue is addressed in the new clause—and, certainly, in my amendment (a) to which I shall come in a moment. The House is to be confronted with a problem: it will have to choose from three options as opposed to choosing either for or against what the Government propose. We all know that the procedures of the House are designed to enable us to vote yes or no. But the Government say that they will come forward with three proposals on Sunday trading. Will the Minister explain how we are to vote on three proposals?

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Maybe.

Mr. Bennett: As my hon. Friend says, maybe.

The great difficulty with such a vote is that its outcome will depend on which of the three proposals comes first. That decision may be made by the parliamentary draftsman; if it is not, the onus will be on Madam Speaker to choose which option should come first. The danger is that, unless there is a clear majority for one proposal, whichever option comes first is likely to be defeated. If we manage to get the three options voted on today, that problem may become evident.

Suppose that deregulation is the first option voted on. Those who want the present Sunday trading laws relaxed to some extent and those who want to keep Sunday special will vote against. If the middle option is voted on first, those who support deregulation and those who wish to keep Sunday special will vote against. That presents a major difficulty—unless we can design new voting procedures whereby it will be possible to establish that, say, 300 hon. Members voted for option A. 200 for option B and 150 for option C. I hope that the Government will address that major problem and ensure that, when they put the three options before us, they do not stack the decision in favour of what they want while pretending to the country that hon. Members will have a free vote on all the proposals.

Mr. Alton: I support the hon. Gentleman's line of argument. Does he recall that when the present Home Secretary was Secretary of State for Health, he had experience of using this three-card trick in relation to the human fertilisation and embryology legislation?

Mr. Bennett: I may not entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman as regards the outcome on that occasion, but I take his point that that is the problem with the way in which voting is conducted.

I hope that the House will today give the Government a clear indication that one of the options—if not two—is unacceptable and that we may thus narrow the Government's focus. The House will see that amendment (a), which stands in my name, embodies the deregulation option.

Mr. Fabricant: May I again make the point that I raised with my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) concerning the number of hon. Members present today. Are not members of the Government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The number of hon. Members present has nothing to do with the new clause.

Mr. Bennett: I have certainly been conscious that many people in my constituency know that we are to vote on Sunday trading today; they have been writing me letters asking me to be here and I have had the day marked in my diary for a long time. I know the strength of feeling that exists in my constituency on this matter—not all of it on the same side. My constituents expect me to be here. We must accept responsibility. There are many Fridays on which we do not need to attend, but that is our choice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would not reply to the intervention of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), on which I have already ruled.

Mr. Bennett: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We all have a responsibility as regards whether we are here for votes that take place in the House. If an hon. Member is not here, that is his fault: he cannot complain about the result.

Hon. Members will have the opportunity to choose from three options. My amendment embodies the deregulation option. Let me explain to the House that I tabled it to help my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore to get it on to the amendment paper. I instructed him to try to find someone who was an enthusiastic deregulator to put his or her name to it. My hon. Friend was unable to find such an enthusiastic deregulator.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I cannot see how amendment (a) fits in with the long title of the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: Let us put it this way: Madam Speaker selected it and, as far as I am concerned, that is that question answered. If my hon. Friend wants to pursue the matter further, he is entitled to do so. The explanation given to me was that it would help if one included regulations subject to affirmative resolution by the House.

If they have the opportunity to do so, enthusiastic deregulators should vote for amendment (a), although I may say that my hon. Friend's failure to find any hon. Member to put his name to the deregulation amendment was not for want of trying. The fact is that not many people in this country want total deregulation.

Mr. Alton: Is not it the case that, when the Government introduced their own proposals for total deregulation, they could not muster a majority in prime time—let alone on a Friday?

Mr. Bennett: I accept that argument. If we do nothing else, we should try today to establish that there is not a majority in the House for total deregulation and so get that option out of the way.

Although I tabled the amendment, I hope that deregulation will ultimately be rejected. I think that it is important that we should keep Sunday special to enable people to enjoy their religious rights. It is important that one day of the week is kept different. I am worried about the greed implicit in the fact that people continually want to go shopping. Given the tremendous commercial pressures, it is well worth having certain restrictions. I believe that keeping Sunday special has advantages for family life. I also accept the point made by the right hon. Member for Selby that seven-day trading, especially in food, only serves to put up prices. I also have sympathy with many of my constituents who live near supermarkets and who bought their property on the understanding that, on one day at least, they would be free of all the traffic and noise. It would be unfair to inflict extra trading hours on those people.

People say that we should be free to shop on Sundays. The trouble with most freedoms is that one person's freedom is someone else's restriction. I hope that the House will be able to vote today and make it absolutely clear that it would like the Government to go ahead with a Bill along the lines of my hon. Friend's Bill. If that happens, it would be logical not to wait for a Government Bill but to ask the Government to find extra time so that we can continue and complete our deliberations on a Bill along the present lines. That would enable us to stop the illegal trading that is taking place at present. It would also save the House a lot of time in the next Session, in which the Government claim that they will have a lot of work to do.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): It may be helpful if I intervene, on what I intend to be the only occasion this morning, to make some observations on what the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) almost described as this unique, not-to-be-repeated special offer of new clause 14, with added amendment (a).

I am sure that it will be helpful—if you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me—if I restate briefly the Government's position on the Bill and on the way in which Sunday trading issues might best be resolved. The Government have long believed that Sunday trading cannot satisfactorily be sorted out by means of a private Member's Bill: the issues are too involved; the House is too divided; and the time available is too short. The huge number of amendments on the amendment paper bears out the correctness of that judgment, as do the further major amendments that the hon. Member for Ogmore promises will be introduced in the other place.

Although I admire the hon. Gentleman's tenacity and dedication, which have brought his Bill such a long way, and the sincerity and devotion of those advising him in the Keep Sunday Special campaign, I have to say that the Government do not believe that it will be possible to reach an effective, coherent and durable conclusion by means of his Bill or any other private Member's Bill.

11.30 am

The House must have the opportunity to compare, contrast and choose between fully worked versions of all the major reform proposals, which command support in the country and the retail trade as well as the House, with time for hon. Members and their constituents to assess and weigh what it will mean for their constituencies, and shopping arrangements locally. Putting in a complex new clause and a further amendment like this at the last moment on a Friday and saying that it will provide for the whole range of choices is not a substitute for that considered debate that the House believes is necessary before it can come to a satisfactory conclusion—despite the witty but unconvincing dismissal of the point by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison)—especially when few hon. Members, not least those who support the other reform options, had any inkling of what would apparently be on offer today before the letter from the hon. Member for Ogmore dated Tuesday 11 May.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) acknowledged that the new clause does not give the House those fully worked choices. Instead, it will give the Secretary of State at some time in the future the power, if he so decided, to bring forward orders to change the categories of shops that might register to open. I do not think, therefore, that the new clause represents the generous offer that the hon. Member for Ogmore clearly believes it to be, even supposing that the order-making power of the Secretary of State was as broad as the hon. Gentleman expects the new clause to make it.

I have not had sufficient time to study the clause and take advice, but I am sceptical, like the hon. Member for

Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), about whether a Bill with a long title which says that it provides for a general prohibition on Sunday opening—and debated as such on Second Reading—could possibly be elastic enough to provide power to the Secretary of State to make a valid order allowing a majority of, let alone all, shops, to open. Of course, that will be a matter finally for the Chair, not for me.

The issue of Sunday trading has come to the House so many times in the past and has always been left unresolved. The long way round by way of a Government Bill next Session on this issue will prove to be the shortest way home, and the new clause and the further amendments promised by the hon. Member for Ogmore for another place confirm me in that view. That is why the Government will publish, in the next few weeks, their own Bill containing the major reform proposals. I cannot give a more precise date, as the Government are heavily dependent on the campaign groups coming to decisions on the details of their proposals. With the hon. Gentleman saying that there were additional important amendments to the Bill to be tabled in another place, even the Keep Sunday Special campaign has not got its Bill in its final form.

Together with the Bill, the Government will publish an objective commentary explaining what each of the options would do—who would be able to open, who would have to shut and when, and, most crucially, how the resultant legislation would be enforced.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I will not give way to my hon. Friend, although I should like to do so. If I start to give way, I will be taking a great deal of time—and that would be unfair. When I come to the end of my remarks, and if I have not answered my hon. Friend's questions, I will take his intervention. I hope that he will understand that there will be many interventions on what the Government intend to do, which is not on the subject of this Bill, and it would be wrong for me to take up the time of the House on that matter.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I will not give way for the same reasons that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). At the end, I will give way to my hon. Friend and then the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) if I have not covered their points in my remaining remarks.

I stressed that it was important that the new Act should be enforceable. Many hon. Members—I agree with them—complain that the present law is ignored. Local authorities, whose job it is to enforce it, say that it is too difficult and too expensive. I am sorry that they believe that, but I understand why they do. Whichever choice is made—whether it is now or, as the Government would advise, with a more considered opportunity by means of a Government Bill later—it is agreed by virtually everyone that it is essential that the provisions of any new Act must be readily capable of effective enforcement. The Bill that we are debating would be even more difficult to enforce than the Shops Act 1950. That legislation has proved especially difficult to put into effect.

Although the hon. Member for Ogmore no longer intends to rely on the 80:20 per cent. turnover provision for small shops, if he is successful with his amendments in another place he will still require them to register under one or other class A head. Registration would be granted on information supplied by shopkeepers. The Bill would not require local authorities to verify what they are told, but would give them a duty to enforce the law. How would local authorities enforce it? How would they know which shops they should check? To check them all would be a gargantuan job. To leave it to chance or complaint from the public or a bruised competitor would be grossly unfair and generally ineffective.

The larger stores over 3,000 sq ft would still be allowed to trade on Sunday only if 80 per cent. of turnover was derived from a specified list of products. That would mean that neither the retailer nor the local authority would know whether an offence had been committed until a certain period had passed. The law cannot operate effectively in that way. An offence must relate to a specific act on a specific date, not to a pattern of trading over time.

I do not want to labour that point and take up precious time; nor do I want to pass judgment on what the hon. Member for Ogmore and other hon. Members want to achieve. However, I have a duty to leave the House with the full realisation that if it decides to give the Bill a Third Reading today, and if the resultant Act is to be capable of enforcement and restoring respect for the law in this area, it will have to be not only amended but comprehensively recast in another place.

Therefore, I hope that the House will conclude that it would be best if this Bill were reconstructed for inclusion in a Government Bill in the autumn. It may take a few months longer, but that course will produce legislation that is fair, more effective and durable, and be much more likely to reflect the mature judgment of the House and the country.

Mr. Cormack: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because this is a crucial point for many people. Is my hon. Friend giving the House an unequivocal undertaking that there will be legislation in the Queen's speech and that that will be proceeded with before the summer recess, together with the document that he discussed? Will he be making some strong recommendations about what will happen to the lawbreakers?

Mr. Lloyd: The Government intend to introduce a Bill early in the next Session. I can confirm that we intend, well before the summer recess, to publish a Bill with the major choices in it, together with a commentary describing what those major choices would do in practice and how they would be enforced. It is vital that hon. Members and their constituents are able to see what those complicated choices would do. There needs to be sufficient time for a public debate before a Bill comes to the House.

I, together with my hon. and right hon. Friends in the Government, regard it as most important that, whichever choices we end up with, the law should be clear and capable of being effectively enforced. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South that the present situation has a corrosive effect on respect for the law. We have a major law with which many people do not agree, and those who are charged by law to enforce it—the local authorities—find it extremely difficult to do so. We want to get away from that position.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Back them up.

Mr. Lloyd: It is not a simple matter of backing them up, as the right hon. Gentleman says. The law is perfectly clear: it falls to the local authorities to enforce it, not to the Government. Therein lies the Government's major difficulty in that respect.

Ms Ruddock: The Minister presents a well-thought-out case about how to give the House real options. He uses in support of that the pressure groups. He says that they have not yet worked up their options. Will he acknowledge that all those pressure groups include in their proposals full employment protection for workers who might work on Sundays? Will he make it clear that if the choices are to be comprehensive and representative of the pressure groups, they must embody employment protection? That is a matter not of choice but of consensus.

If the Minister looks at early-day motion 1929, it will be clear to him that the number of his hon. Friends who have supported it is more than his parliamentary majority. In a free and real choice, employment protection for Sunday workers would have to be presented by the Government.

Mr. Lloyd: I accept the hon. Lady's point that employment protection and the way in which it should be incorporated into the Bill is a lively issue which is important to many people. Part of the Bill will be devoted to employee protection. Like any other part of the Bill, it will be subject to amendments and votes of the House. I believe that we shall end up with a Bill that includes a clause on employee protection which commands the support of a majority of the House. But I would be straying from the new clause if I were to expand on that.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore and his friends in KSS for bringing this complex Bill so far. I also thank them for the constructive and lengthy discussions that they have held with my officials in which many problems with the practical working of the Bill were identified. I am impressed by the determination with which they have set about the difficult and frustrating task of curing them. However, as I have said today as clearly as I can, there is, alas, still a long way to go. However, I am sure that the curative process could be completed well in time for the Government Bill in the autumn and, I hope, for the publication of the Government's draft Bill before the summer recess, although there are only a few more weeks for that.

Mr. Alton: The Minister has tried to convince the House that we should have a touching regard for the Government's superior ability to introduce legislation on complex issues such as Sunday trading, which mere Back Benchers cannot possibly understand. On the day after the Government—indeed, the Minister's own Department—came to the House to tell us that they got the Criminal Justice Bill wrong and they could not understand issues such as unitary fines and access to previous records, and leaving aside the community charge or compulsory testing, the Minister will forgive us for saying that his great confidence in the Government's superiority over Back Benchers is misplaced.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman share my wish that the Government's proposals will include not only proposals in law but explanations? Bearing in mind the stated views of the Home Secretary, which I suspect that the Minister of State shares, and the views of the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), there is clearly a great weight of opinion at the top of the Conservative party in favour of total deregulation. Does the hon. Gentleman share my anxiety that the explanations may be weighted the wrong way? Perhaps we ought to consider that carefully.

Mr. Alton: On this occasion, as on many occasions in the Committee, I am happy to be associated with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman. He has put them succinctly today. I am also worried about the motives of those within the Department who will present both the explanatory memoranda and the Bill.

The House will perhaps forgive me if I recall for a moment the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. It was mentioned in the context of this Bill during an earlier intervention. Three choices were laid before the House, as they have been in new clause 14. I shall not detain the House long on this point, but, as a result of the confusion that arose, we ended up with legislation which allows abortion up to birth on the handicapped. I do not believe that it was ever the intention of the House to allow that. But that is what happens when legislation is drafted and choices are offered in this manner. People become confused.

So I hope that people will not be gulled into believing that the Government can introduce proposals that will have great clarity, but Back Benchers cannot. After all, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and many other Acts are the Government's legislation, not ours.

11.45 am

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that after listening to the Minister today, people will have grave concern that he could not give an unequivocal declaration that those who would have to work on Sunday and refused to do so would be protected? He failed to give such a declaration today.

Mr. Alton: Indeed, he did. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden also failed to deal with that. Conservative Members talk, as she did, about choice. They say that choice is the most important thing. They elevate the idea of choice to an ideology or philosophy. Yet they fail to understand that for many people there is no choice when economic pressures are placed on them to work on Sundays. Such workers will often be women. We have heard people suggest that those of us who take a different view are misogynists. What nonsense. Many women want to be protected from having to work on Sunday and from exploitation by commercial pressures. What choice will there be for employees who want to operate their conscience if their employer says that they will either work on Sunday or lose their job? Those people will be forced to work on Sundays and we know it.

The Minister also said that it would be impossible under the terms of the Bill to deal with enforcement. There is no way in which that can be true. Local authorities up and down the land are capable of enforcement on a range of issues. I was deputy leader of the city council for some years and a member of the council for eight years. Enforcement is a day-to-day part of the work of local authorities. They will be able to enforce the legislation, just as they enforce many other requirements.

The Minister said that it would not be possible to go back and see what went on before. That is precisely what happens in cases of tax evasion every day of the week. Of course the Inland Revenue does not know that an offence is being committed at that moment. But it finds out about it and prosecutes subsequently. So the Minister's argument is ludicrous.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Minister's argument is perfectly absurd. The Health and Safety Executive does not examine every factory, but it expects that spot checks will work. They could work equally well for the Bill.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: I cannot give way until I have dealt with the first intervention. The Minister was sparing in taking interventions. He took only two—one from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman and the other at the end of his remarks. That gave the game away. The Government do not want to have an open and free debate in the House today or at any other time because they know what they want—total deregulation. That is the agenda. They will try to push it through. If they cannot do it by fair means, they will do it by foul. If they can load the three options placed before the House, they will do it in that way. The Minister is grinning because he knows that that is true. He knows that if the Government can load the options, they will succeed. By chicanery and trickery, they will put their agenda through.

New clause 14 gives us a chance to deal with the three options. I hope that we will take it.

Mr. Dykes: What is the point of the Government indulging in such antics? They know full well that they cannot get full deregulation through the House.

Mr. Alton: Absolutely. The only time that the Government were defeated in the 13 years up to the last general election was on this issue. A coalition of Members from across the House said that they wished to keep Sunday as a special day. That is what the House of Commons decided to do. Will the Government accept that verdict? No. They have come back time and again, as have Members such as the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden, and tabled amendments. They have tabled 135 amendments and 13 new clauses; 99 of the amendments and new clauses are in the name of the right hon. Lady. She is a former Minister in the Home Office. She had the chance to legislate.

The Government were not prepared to accept the will of the House and they never will be. That is why they do not deserve our trust today and why we should proceed with the vote which I hope you will allow, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in due course so that we can determine the issues and they are not determined by people of whose motives we should be deeply suspicious.

Mr. Thomason: The hon. Gentleman alleged that it would be easy for local authorities to enforce the legislation encapsulated in the Bill. Does he agree that the Bill requires local government officers to investigate the books of those businesses that they want to open on Sunday in order to establish the 80:20 rule? The Bill does not specify, however, which books of which year should be under inspection. A degree of accountancy expertise would be required by the inspectors expected to enforce the legislation—expertise which is beyond their normal job specification. Although many of us may not object to the principles underlying the Bill, their practical enforcement would be almost impossible.

Mr. Alton: It will not be impossible. The 80:20 rule is clear. Shops will be able to show from their accounts of a previous year their precise trading figures. Any trading standards officer worth his salt will have no difficulty with that. The common sense of the courts will also be at play and vicarious prosecutions will not be brought purely on the basis of malice against some small shopkeeper.

At present, there are clear abuses, day by day, of the Shops Act 1950, but the Government have encouraged local authorities to turn a blind eye to the law breakers. How can hon. Members claim to be concerned about the epidemic of crime, or the standards and values of our young people when they break the law, when we are prepared to condone the breaking of a law when it is done by people for the sole reason of mercenary, monetary interest? They make huge sums of money from being able to keep their shops open.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we cannot trust the Government, because we have already had experience of what Government promises on employee rights mean not only for Sunday work, but weekday work. The Government claimed that if betting shops were open in the evening it would make no difference to the terms and conditions of the employees, if they chose not to work at night.

William Hill has now presented its employees with a contract that covers evening work. If any employee refuses to sign it—most of them are women—he or she will simply be sacked. Two people with more than 30 years of experience between them were given the alternative of signing that new contract or going down the road in search of a job. The Government have refused to take any action in that case.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing that to the attention of the House, because that is why those on the Front Bench must not be lured into voting for new clause 14.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *rose*—

Mr. Alton: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who was not prepared to give way himself, in a moment. No guarantees have been given on employment protection and until there are, how anyone can vote for the Government's proposals, even if he is in favour of Sunday trading, I do not know.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Any employee whose contract is unilaterally changed by his employer and who is dismissed if he does not agree to that contract, is dismissed unfairly. There is a remedy at law, which is exactly the same for any other employee who is treated unfairly.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful for that intervention, which enables me to refer to a letter sent to me in April from the chief executive of Budgens in which he dealt specifically with the employment implications of the Bill. He stated:

"As a multiple grocer with 98 stores, Budgens plc has been one of the pioneers of Sunday Trading."

In other words, it has broken the law and is on the Minister's side. He went on:

[Mr. Alton]

"On balance, we have experienced an increase in sales of 10 per cent."

It has been doing well and making money.

"We understand that other large food retailer multiples have similar experiences.

The issue of Sunday Trading is not important to Budgens as such. Our commercial losses and gains are about equal. But, for the following reasons we believe only food stores with less than 3,000 sq. ft. sales area should be allowed to trade on Sundays:

Approximately £5 billion of market share at today's prices will shift towards the multiple food chains. This potentially represents a net loss of employment of 44,000-50,000 people due to the labour cost differential . . . as a result of much higher labour productivity in large food stores/superstores.

This is likely to cost the nation between £400-500 million in unemployment support. Social, criminal and economic problems associated with unemployment are widespread."

That is what Budgens, an ally of the Government, thinks about the Bill. That letter makes the point about the potential loss of jobs, to which the Minister also referred, very well. Added to that will be the many people who will be forced to work on Sunday who currently do not.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely generous in giving way. He has speculated about the viewpoint of the Minister of State, as have others on both sides of the House. Is not this debate the best opportunity for the Minister to say exactly where he stands? He has addressed the House, but should not he tell us, if only by intervention, exactly where he stands on the three options?

Mr. Alton: The right hon. Gentleman asked me to give way and I will happily give way to the Minister if, in due course, he wants to intervene to make that point.

Mrs. Wise: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: I shall do so in a moment, but I should make progress, consider the three options and explain my position on them.

We have the chance to sort things out with new clause 14. The first of the options, to which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred, is total deregulation. I hope that the House will vote against that, as it has in the past. If we were to give the Secretary of State total power to decide which shops should or should not open on a Sunday, far too much responsibility would be passed into the hands of someone whose motives are only too well known.

The second option is that of the SHRC, which is deregulation by the back door. It proposes that all shops under 3,000 sq. ft. should be able to open at any hour on a Sunday, regardless of the goods sold, and that large shops exceeding that size must notify the local authority of which six hours they wish to open out of a specified eight-hour period. The SHRC proposals effectively provide for total deregulation. They do not offer effective employment protection, enforceable in tribunals. According to the latest statement from the Minister and his colleagues, the only employment protection to be offered in the Government Bill is for existing employees. Until we obtain clarification on that, I do not see how anyone who cares about employment protection could possibly vote for the SHRC proposal.

No employment protection is offered for workers in shops in Scotland, as there is in the Bill offered by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), which represents the third option. To achieve the third option it is therefore necessary to vote against new clause 14, if we get to that vote. I should like to explain why the House should vote accordingly.

The Bill received its Second Reading with a majority of 173. It is also worth noting that 257 hon. Members have now signed the early-day motion before the House, so there is clearly a majority view that Parliament should do something along the lines of the Keep Sunday Special campaign proposals. Those proposals have been pragmatically amended in Committee, in line with what the hon. Member for Ogmore promised the House on Second Reading.

In Committee, more than 200 amendments were given detailed consideration. The Bill was amended in a number of important respects, including allowing DIY stores to open on a Sunday and garden centres to sell their full range of goods. It provides for a wide variety of shops to be open —a total of 26 categories, which are up to 3,000 sq ft in size. Anyone who suggests that the hon. Member for Ogmore has been inflexible or unreasonable entirely misses the point. Many of us would argue that he has gone too far, but we recognise that the Bill needs to command the widest possible support and I believe that the hon. Gentleman has gone a long way to achieving that.

The Bill will not allow Sunday to become a free-for-all. When my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was speaking on the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Bill earlier, someone questioned his motives for doing so. I am not sure what those motives were, but he referred to Corky the cockerel. I should like to refer to another bird, the kingfisher. That bird is found on the headed notepaper of many large stores that are members of the Kingfisher Group, one of which is Woolworths.

A woman came to my surgery on Saturday last to complain about the Woolworths store in the Allerton road area of Liverpool, which I have mentioned in the House before. It chooses to break the law and is currently open on a Sunday. That causes congestion in the small terraced street in which that woman lives. During the week, she works with mentally handicapped people and she told me that she will soon develop mental illness because of the noise, rowdiness and comings and goings on the street on the one day when she expects to be able to build up her energy to face her demanding job in the next six days.

This week I have written to the Woolworths store and the Kingfisher group to ask them to comply with the law. The Bill and new clause 14 gives us the chance to sort the matter out and ensure that people living in such areas do not have their Sundays disrupted and that Sunday remains a special day. That is why the House should vote against deregulation, against the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposals and against the new clause, and leave the Bill intact.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

12 noon

Mr. Alton: No, I am about to conclude my speech—I have spoken at length. I have been generous in giving way and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to speak later in the debate.

The Minister said that the Government were not prepared to provide time for the Bill, which is to their

discredit. The status of Back Benchers in this place is constantly being reduced. It seems that the only things that we can deal with are tethering ponies and other obscure issues, and the House of Commons cannot decide on an issue such as Sunday trading—which the Government have conceded should be on a free vote. Why do not the Government provide the time for the Bill, which has completed its Second Reading and Committee stage, and which will have completed much of its Report stage today?

Here is an opportunity for the official Opposition, who are also given time in the House. Regardless of whether they are for or against the Bill, I hope that they will allow the Bill to make further progress by considering the use of Opposition time—an Opposition day. We could also consider using minority party time, although there is precious little of it. If the Government are not prepared to honour the intentions behind the Bill and the overriding view of the majority of hon. Members that it should make progress, we shall ensure that Back Benchers' rights are upheld. Other parties in the House must achieve what the Government have so lamentably failed to do.

Mr. Cormack: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who made a passionate appeal and a sensible speech. I appreciated the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister gave way to me, but I could not understand what he was getting at. It is not as if the arguments have not been well rehearsed—even over-rehearsed. It has been made abundantly clear, from the vote on Second Reading, the early-day motion signed by—I think—257 hon. Members and in so many other ways, that the manifest will of the majority of hon. Members is to amend the law on Sunday trading, but not to have total deregulation.

One talks about the dog that barked in the night—or did not. I was surprised and disappointed that my hon. Friend the Minister did not intervene when he was given the opportunity to do so and was challenged to give his personal views on Sunday trading. I suspect that today we are debating, not the Bill's Report stage, which was so well orchestrated by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), but the Government's hidden agenda—total deregulation.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, with his characteristically robust bravado, has made it clear that he supports total deregulation. He is fully entitled to that view. It also seems that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has a similar view—I should be delighted to be corrected. It is apparent that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Mordan (Dame A. Rumbold)—who, as a previous Minister with responsibility for the subject, has to display a certain agnosticism—is also very much in favour of total deregulation. She is fully entitled to those views.

From time to time, all of us, whatever views we embrace, find ourselves in a minority. It is not the job or prerogative of the Government at any time or in any place to usurp the manifest will of the majority, which is what is happening.

Dame Angela Rumbold: It is a dangerous practice to assume that one knows the way in which one's colleagues are likely to vote. My hon. Friend is not entirely correct in his assumptions about my personal choice.

Mr. Cormack: If I am wrong, I am delighted. If my right hon. Friend, for whom I have a high regard, does not believe in total deregulation, but in something along the lines of the Bill, that is fine.

We had a full debate on Second Reading. The hon. Member for Ogmore showed exemplary flexibility in Committee and accepted amendments. I am sorry that I could not serve on the Standing Committee which was, by all accounts, a good Committee. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden said that it was a good Committee. Issues were debated at length and amendments were made. In a true non-partisan spirit, the hon. Member for Ogmore has made it absolutely plain that if the Bill leaves this House for another place, he does not expect it to return unaltered. Time and again, he has made it plain that he is happy to sit down with Ministers to discuss refinements and improvements. The Government do not have a prerogative on perfection in legislation. We only have to recall the events of less than 24 hours ago to be aware of that.

What is the obstacle? In another place, there are many Members on both sides of the House and on the Cross Benches with enormous experience who can contribute to the Bill. I am not talking about the Bench of Bishops; my views do not stem from a sabbatarian stance—far from it. I do not want, and never have wanted, a high street Sunday. I do not want Saturday to be replicated. [HON. MEMBERS: "Stay away."] My hon. Friends tell me to stay away. In doing so, they show a total misunderstanding of what I am trying to say.

As the hon. Member for Mossley Hill made clear when he quoted the letter from his constituent, if there is a high street Sunday that replicates Saturday, one cannot stop the world and get off. If one lives in the heart of a city or town, one is stuck there, and surrounded and enveloped by the activity. I remember a Good Friday in Wolverhampton soon after I moved to the midlands nearly 25 years ago. I was so astounded by the frenetic commercial activity, which was so different from the atmosphere in my native Lincolnshire, that I rammed my car into the one in front—it was a costly Good Friday. A high street Sunday would result in many such incidents.

Today we have been given an opportunity—ingeniously devised by the hon. Member for Ogmore, assisted by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—to exercise choice. The House can pronouce on the three choices—total deregulation and the two forms of amendment. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill, with his characteristic skill, took us through the details of the choice; I shall not attempt to repeat what he said, as it would be superfluous to do so.

We have a choice. There is no problem about hon. Members not knowing about today's business. Of course, it is commonly understood that one does not know the nature of specific amendments until close to the day on which they are to be debated. We constantly live our lives in ignorance of what is to happen in the week ahead. We do not know the business for the following week until the previous Thursday and many of us have to adjust our timetables accordingly. But that does not apply to Fridays. We have known for a very long time that this day would be largely devoted to the issue of Sunday trading, and we have known for a few days that this crucial new clause existed. There is no reason, therefore, why the Lobbies

[Mr. Cormack]

should not be full at 2.30 pm or thereabouts. I believe that it would be wrong of the Government to insist on frustrating the will of the House——

Mr. Fabricant: Nonsense.

Mr. Cormack: It is not nonsense. My hon. Friend, who is a near neighbour of mine, is an expert on the subject of nonsense. We know what the subject before us is——

Mr. Fabricant *rose*——

Mr. Cormack: My hon. Friend served on the Committee, and if he will just contain himself for a moment I will point out to him that no Member of the House, present or absent, has any excuse for not knowing the business today.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my near neighbour for giving way. I said "nonsense" because we have known for only three days that there was to be a choice between these three areas. I also said it because my hon. Friend claimed that the Lobbies could be full. There are 651 Members of Parliament. Does my hon. Friend seriously claim that they will all be in the Lobbies? I think not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has repeatedly intervened on this and related subjects this morning. I hope that he will not do that any more.

Mr. Cormack: Every Member knows the business of the House for the day and makes his or her choice accordingly. As to the nature of the amendments, hon. Members can look at the amendment paper and see what amendments are being tabled—and they can adjust their diaries, if they feel it necessary to do so.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I hesitate to intervene on this fraternal strife, but the hon. Gentleman has said that it would be superfluous to go through the alternative procedures when we come to vote. But surely those procedures are an incomprehensible dog's breakfast? If hon. Members want to secure what I take it the hon. Gentleman himself wants—restricted Sunday trading—they must vote against the new clause moved by the promoter of the Bill, who may have to vote against it himself. What sense is there in that?

Mr. Cormack: As I said when I paid the hon. Member for Ogmore a compliment, he is adopting an ingenious procedure, in response to requests from various parts of the House. He is doing it to tell the Government that they do not need to waste their time with the three options, because the House can pronounce on them this Friday.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cormack: I am sorry, but I must get on. I promised to be brief, and I have already gone on for far too long —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—because I have given way to those who have intervened.

The Government are always saying that they need more time to get their legislation right. Here is a marvellous opportunity for them to allow a subject to be dealt with in a private Member's Bill. To claim that the subject is too complicated is an insult to the House. One has only to look at many of the issues that have been decided in the past by private Members' Bills—the abolition of the death penalty, the creation of conservation areas—to recognise that matters of great moment and of fundamental importance to many people have frequently been decided in this way.

12.15 pm

Hon. Members have referred to workers' rights. I wholly accept the Government's wish for proper protection in legislation for workers, but if we move towards total deregulation it will be increasingly difficult to maintain that stance. Only the other day, I was told by a member of Her Majesty's Government, whose driver's wife works in a branch of Sainsbury, that, in spite of Sainsbury's frequently proclaimed assertion that it does not wish to interfere with the freedom of conscience of its workers, the women had come under intolerable pressure —so much so that it had been acknowledged in a letter from the company's head or regional office.

This would happen increasingly, and over time it would have the inevitable consequence of cutting away the very foundations on which the village and corner shop economy is built. We would be destroying an element of the very choice in which we frequently proclaim we believe, to the disadvantage of our constituents, whether they live in villages or in small streets served by the corner shop. Total deregulation would spell the slow decline and death of most of these shops.

Hon. Members have mentioned the lawbreakers. One of the reasons why I regret the Government's refusal to allow the Bill to proceed is the fact—the Minister acknowledged his own unease on this score—that so many people are breaking the law. All over the country, large stores are opening in flagrant violation of the law. It is no excuse to blame local authorities. We have not heard from the Dispatch Box the ringing denunciation of this lawbreaking that we should have heard. It is inexcusable and it creates perverse double standards for those who talk of law and order and the need to enforce them.

If for no other reason than that, I ask the Minister to think again and allow the Bill to go to another place to be further improved. My hon. Friend can play a part in improving it, so that we can have something on the statute book well before next Christmas, thereby doing something positive and definite to stop a pernicious kind of lawbreaking.

Ms Janet Anderson: I wish to commend new clause 10 to the House. The Report stage of a private Member's Bill is the last place to be holding a debate such as this, on new clause 14. It is much more a Second Reading matter as it goes to the heart of the Bill.

New clause 10 is a genuine attempt to amend the Bill, and is much more in keeping with it. It does not go as far as new clause 14, but it would introduce a welcome element of flexibility by allowing more classes of shop to register under clause 3 and by altering some of the current requirements that might, in the fullness of time, seem unnecessary or irrelevant.

If the sponsers of the Bill were forced to translate the long title into plain English, they would probably say, "This is a Bill that closes shops on Sundays, unless they sell goods or services that contribute to recreation, emergencies, social gatherings or travel"—the REST proposals— "and provides protection for Sunday shop workers." Most of us agree about the necessity for that protection.

That is not quite the approach that the Bill takes in practice. No doubt for good legal reasons, the sponsors of the Bill have not tried to insert into law tests based on whether shops satisfy the REST proposals. Instead, they have set out all the goods and types of shop which they think meet the various REST proposals. That presents a problem. Because the REST proposals are not defined in a detailed way, it is hard to see how some shops have been fitted into them but others rejected. For example, DIY shops are recreational, but second-hand book shops are not. I endorse the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), as set out in the article in *The Independent* yesterday to which reference has already been made. She said:

"Given the number of men on the committee (18 out of 21) it was perhaps predictable that various exceptions have been proposed to the general ban on Sunday shopping. 'Boys' shops' such as DIY stores and motor spares shops will be allowed to open; supermarkets and the clothes shops that women want will not. It appears that a woman's place is in the home, at least on Sundays, while a man's is out at the shops, down the pub, up a ladder or under a car. Is it not also a case of double standards for many male MPs to favour more Sunday sporting events but not more Sunday shopping?"

It is essential that the law, if it is not to be brought into disrepute, keeps up to date with what people want, and remains enforceable. New clause 10 gives the Secretary of State power to add new classes of shop to the Bill. It will allow the Government of the day to remedy any oversights that we have not picked up. Without it, it is entirely possible that we shall face a whole new set of private Members' Bill adjusting this one as oversights are remedied.

It is possible that the Bill will have unexpected loopholes. We know that the Shops Act 1950 has brought a great deal of income to lawyers down the years, as they have pored over it looking for new ways to stretch its meaning. Almost by definition, we would not expect to discover loopholes today, or we would have closed them. If the Bill contains loopholes—it would be a brave Member of Parliament who declared any but the most simple legislative measure free of such loopholes—the new clause gives the Government of the day the power to close them.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I raised this point earlier, but I did not get a satisfactory answer. The sale of wet fish, which is covered by the 1950 Act, is important to Grimsby. Is new clause 10 the way to allow what I want to be allowed—the sale of wet fish on Sundays?

Ms Anderson: I agree with my hon. Friend. As he has said, with all the amendments, concessions and compromises, the Bill has become something of a dog's breakfast. Those of us who support the SHRC proposals, are constantly misrepresented as being in favour of deregulation, but we are not. We are in favour of legislation based on size of outlet rather than on type of goods sold. Any Bill based on the latter is bound to be anomalous, as my hon. Friend has rightly said.

Mr. Thomason: Does the hon. Lady agree that it is a strange anomaly that, under new clause 14, spare parts for motor vehicles can be sold, but motor vehicles themselves cannot be?

Ms Anderson: That is a good example of the mess that the Bill has become.

One of the most obvious problems of the Shops Act 1950 is that it has failed to keep up not just with changes to retailing but with changes of life style in our wider society. The Act was already pretty outdated when it came into being. It was largely a consolidating measure and much of it can be dated back as far as 1936. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that it cannot cope with the huge changes in the way that we work and shop. In 1950, 26 per cent. of married women worked. Now, 61 per cent. work, even though they are still largely responsible for the shopping. I speak as a working mother who is still largely responsible for the shopping. That is not to say that my husband is not willing to do the shopping. He is, but he generally gets it wrong.

Mr. Stern: As one who has overcome that barrier, may I recommend a course of action to the hon. Lady? If she allows him enough practice, he will eventually get it right.

Ms Anderson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that advice.

DIY shops, video shops, garden centres and out-of-town shopping developments did not exist in 1950. Shop workers were largely full-time workers; now they are largely part-time workers. Whether we like it or not, religious observance by Christians has declined, while that by Muslims, whose holy day has no legal recognition, has increased.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Lady agree that in Scotland, where there are no Sunday trading restrictions, more people attend church on Sundays than is the case in England, where there are Sunday trading restrictions?

Ms Anderson: The hon. Gentleman is right. Attendance at places of worship on Sunday in Scotland is higher than it is in England and Wales, and shops there have been allowed to open for many years.

The new clause, as the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) said earlier, is an attempt to give the Bill what engineers would call future-proofing. If whole new sectors of shopping come into being, the Bill can be amended by statutory instrument to take account of those changes.

Perhaps most importantly, the new clause will allow the law to be changed when there is public demand for change, without Parliament having to go through the difficult and time-consuming process of introducing new legislation. The sponsors of the Bill might be a little suspicious of that argument, although they claim to have public opinion on their side, but the actions in recent months of hon. Members on both sides of the House who support the Bill make the case for incorporating the new clause, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) showed when he predicted that, if the Bill goes further, there will be more amendments to it.

The main argument in the behind-the-scenes lobbying that has gone on in the corridors, tea rooms and bars in recent weeks is that the Bill is now a compromise and has caught up with the overwhelming public desire to open DIY stores. At one level, that shows a welcome flexibility by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore and his colleagues, but it also confirms that, even in a short time, views about what should or should not be opened can be changed. Think how much could change in 43 years if we had to wait that long before the House got to grips with Sunday trading again.

[Ms Anderson]

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) will be putting the views of USDAW at great length later if she catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall take the opportunity to place on the record the position of the Transport and General Workers Union and GMB. The TGWU recommended that the Bill be opposed on Second Reading because of fears that it would be too restrictive. It is now carrying out an extensive consultation with its membership to get a clear and comprehensive picture of views on working on Sunday. The union expects that its position will be resolved at this summer's biennial conference.

The GMB has said that it accepts that public pressure for Sunday trading will result in a change in law. Its aim is to protect its members by supporting a limit on the number of hours that shops can open on any day of the week. No worker should be forced to work on Sundays and a refusal to work should not lead to a setback in the worker's prospects. Premium payments should be made in recognition of the special nature of Sunday working.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): My hon. Friend may not know that the position of my union, Manufacturing, Science and Finance, has recently been declared identical with that of the two unions that she mentioned. It has been decided that, as long as provision is made for adequate worker protection—whether by statute or through traditional trade union channels—MSF agrees broadly with the position of the other two unions. It has also been decided that, unless such provision is enshrined in primary legislation, no majority for any other measures will be possible in the House. I have a good deal of experience of such matters, having worked regularly on Sundays before I became a Member of Parliament—that is, when I had a proper job.

Ms Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention; my position is the same.

Several of our major trade union colleagues have recognised that flexibility is needed, and that whatever legislation is presented should not be too restrictive. That is the aim of new clause 10, and I commend it to the House.

12.30 pm

Mr. Lord: As almost everything has been said already, I shall try to be brief.

I was disappointed by the Minister's speech, which I did not consider particularly helpful. I thought it rather patronising, which was surprising in his case; I also thought that, in view of all the effort that has gone into the Bill, his approach was very negative. We have been considering this subject since 1986, and it really is time that we got on with it. The Home Secretary's speech yesterday suggested a fresh attitude—a new willingness to accept reality and make progress. That was not true of the Minister's contribution. Moreover, it seemed to reveal his own views—although they have not yet been confirmed; it will be interesting to find out what they are in the end. It is taking time to tease out hon. Members' views.

It is difficult for me to talk about my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) when she is not in the Chamber, but I have talked to her more than once about the problems of the legislation. At the time, she gave the impression that she was relatively unbiased, and was trying to find the best possible solution. Now she seems to be one of those most rabidly in favour of deregulation. When challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), she said that that was not the case, and implied that she might not favour complete deregulation—which, surely, must mean that she favours some kind of regulation. If so, I welcome her attitude, but I hope that the i's will be dotted and the t's crossed in due course.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been pressed several times to give my view. I did not want to take up the House's time with something that is irrelevant to the Bill and the House's decision on it; let me say, however, that—as many of my hon. Friends know, along with all my constituents who have written to me on the subject—Scotland, in my view, has the best arrangement. That is none the less subordinate to my overriding objective of securing effective, enforceable legislation that reflects the considered view of Parliament. I do not believe that this Bill will do that, which is why I made the speech that I made. However, it will be for the House to decide, on a free vote.

Mr. Lord: I understand the Minister's position: he is in favour of total deregulation. That, basically, is the decision that the House will have to make, however we wrap it up. Either we want total deregulation, and are prepared to risk Sunday's becoming just another day of the week, or we must accept that the House has a responsibility to produce some kind of legislation—however difficult it may be—to preserve Sunday as it has been preserved over the years by our forefathers, who were perhaps much wiser in this regard than we seem to be now.

In a sense, new clause 14 sums up the issue. Others have already spoken, so I shall not go into much detail; but it seems to me that either we want to keep Sunday special—a stance that is addressed by the Bill—or we want deregulation. The alternatives involved in deregulation are total deregulation—that is the honest description, and the Minister has been honest—and partial deregulation. I believe that both would result in total deregulation, one way or the other. One alternative makes no bones about it, suggesting that we should clear the decks without troubling to work out the complications; the other would allow all shops measuring less than 3,000 sq ft to open on Sundays, and others for six hours a day.

This Chamber measures approximately 3,000 sq ft. The provision encompasses the vast majority of shops in the country. Under partial deregulation, such shops will be able to open on Sundays regardless of what they sell, while all shops—regardless of size—will be able to open for six hours. Six hours is not far short of a complete trading day. Technically, it is two hours short of a complete trading day, but how long will it be before trading is extended to eight hours a day?

The fact that all shops of the size of the House of Commons would be able to open and that all shops, regardless of size, would be able to open for six hours on a Sunday really means that partial deregulation will result in total deregulation. The two options are not, therefore, what they seem to be. Either we vote for the Bill of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) or we vote for deregulation in one form or another.

Dr. Liam Fox: Does my hon. Friend accept that all hon. Members know the business of the House and have a duty to be here, if they think that it is important to be here?

None the less, a clearer view of the will of the House would be achieved under the proposals outlined by the Minister this morning. We should then have all the summer to consider the proposals and then take a vote, with more Members being aware by the autumn of what they are.

Mr. Lord: I disagree entirely with my hon. Friend. Any hon. Member who is interested in a subject as important as this could have been here today. I accept that a small minority have engagements that it would have been impossible for them to cancel, but all of us have to be fairly light on our feet in the House of Commons and able to respond, often within hours, to various issues. Most hon. Members could have made time to be here and should have been here.

My hon. Friend also referred to the Government's proposals. The Minister told us this morning that the Government do not intend just to introduce legal proposals; there will be explanations of the effect of those proposals. I do not wish to impugn the Government's motives, but when one moves to explanations rather than pure facts there is always room for manoeuvre, depending upon the individual's point of view. We have had a lot of time to think about this issue.

By and large, hon. Members have made up their minds about the matter. If they have not made up their minds about it by now, they jolly well ought to have done. There has been ample opportunity to go into it in great detail. By now, therefore, they should have decided what their constituents want and what they believe they want on behalf of their constituents.

In Committee, we also dealt comprehensively with the issue of Sunday opening before Christmas. It was suggested that all shops should be allowed to open on the four Sundays before Christmas. This was regarded by the majority of the Committee as a matter of principle, where there was no room for negotiation. The Committee decided that there was room for movement on other aspects, but on the issue of shops opening on the four Sundays before Christmas it felt that it could not budge. It is a Christian holiday. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South, I am not sabbatarian about the matter, but it is an important one. It is interesting that my hon. Friend also mentioned Good Friday. It is a long time since we all had a holiday on Good Friday. It is also interesting that we are thinking of introducing a new national holiday and inventing a name for it. But we once had a name for a bank holiday, and that name was Good Friday. Sadly, Good Friday now means business as usual.

If we want to accommodate the extra shopping that is done before Christmas, there is a simple way of accommodating it; by allowing shops to open later in the evening from Monday to Saturday. There is no reason why that should not be allowed. In that way, it would be possible to accommodate the extra shopping required in the weeks before Christmas.

Even though life is hectic and busy for shops in the weeks before Christmas—they want their tills to ring and to make as much money as they can—we must remember that life is also hectic for those who work in shops. They are just as entitled to have their Sundays protected and preserved in the run-up to a Christian holiday as they are at other times of the year.

If there is talk about opening on four Sundays before Christmas, why not make it six Sundays, or 10 Sundays? What not open on Sundays during the January sales, or in the run-up to Easter or in midsummer? Once the principle is breached, there is no knowing where it might lead.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman has rightly referred to the position of shop workers. Is he aware that if they were to resort to the employment tribunals that were mentioned by the Minister in his speech, the prospects of their being reinstated would be pretty bleak? The figures show that only 1 per cent. of all those who go to a tribunal are reinstated, that only 10 per cent. are able successfully to fight their cases in tribunals and that they receive, on average, £1,700 in compensation. In other words, for 99 per cent. of shop workers, there will be no chance of reinstatement and for 90 per cent. of them there will be no compensation.

Mr. Lord: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. This is a minefield. Whatever is written in contracts and whatever assurances are given, pressure builds up and it is easier for someone who wants to keep their job to acquiesce and to accept that pressure. Hon. Members will never hear of the hundreds of thousands of people who have been pressurised into doing something that they do not want to do because they do not want to complain or permanently to damage the atmosphere of their workplace.

It is often said that this matter is complicated and that, in trying to draft legislation we are almost certain to get it wrong—if only slightly. I accept that it is extremely difficult to make such legislation watertight, but is that any reason for taking the easy way out and abandoning all legislation, because that is what is being urged on us? I am sure that it is not. If we believe that Sunday should be a special day, surely it is worth getting our intelligent and highly paid civil servants to redraft the law so that it fits what we want to do to preserve Sunday.

That, in effect, is what the hon. Member for Ogmore has done under this private Member's Bill and my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South referred to huge changes in our life that have been made by private Member's Bills. An enormous amount of effort has gone into the Bill, and I believe that it is the will of the House —with the exception, perhaps, of the Government Front Bench—to preserve our Sundays. Here is the vehicle to do it and we must not waste the opportunity.

Supporters of the Bill are not narrow minded. We are anxious to protect and preserve what is good in our national life. There is so much upheaval now in our country on every possible front. Surely we should fight for stability and to keep in place what we have had for such a long time.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lord: No, I am not giving way any more——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I do not want unduly to curb the hon. Gentleman, but he is now making a more general speech suitable to, say, a Second Reading debate rather than to the two new clauses under consideration.

Mr. Lord: I appreciate that, and I apologise if I have strayed slightly from the straight and narrow.

To most people, Sunday still is an oasis in this hectic life of ours, and future generations will never forgive us if we let our Sunday go.

Mrs. Wise: We heard how anxious the Minister was that the House should have a chance to compare and contrast several fully worked-out choices. That is a novel doctrine of legislation and I wonder whether he intends to extend it to other controversial issues. For instance, will we have several fully worked-out choices on the future of British Rail—a matter which is equally controversial and over which the controversy crosses the Floor? I suspect not. The Minister's expression tells me all. That shows that the Minister is talking now about comparing and contrasting because the Government have no confidence in getting through the House the measures that they want.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has been generous to the opponents of the Bill in new clause 14. Despite my surprise and misgivings, I realise that that generosity is intended to benefit the whole House: hon. Members can debate the options to save the Government the trouble and the time of waiting until the autumn. I appreciate my hon. Friend's motives.

Dr. Fox: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: No. I have not intervened and I am conscious of the time.

I am conscious of the fact that this new clause offers a succinct means of discussing the issues that are raised in all the other amendments. I trust that even the opponents of the Bill would agree that the amendments would not be necessary if the new clause were passed.

12.45 pm

The new clause allows the Shopping Hours Reform Council's proposals to be brought before the House and I shall examine something of what that means. First, there is the six hours of trading. We are told that our legislation is the slippery slope. We are asked, "Why not this sort of shop? Why not that sort of product?" Well, why not seven hours or 10 hours? The six-hour provision is certainly the top of a slippery slope, because there is no principle whatever behind it.

The Bill rests on the desire of the House—and, I believe, of the country—not to have a high street Sunday. As the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) said, we do not want to replicate Saturday on a Sunday. That is the principle of the Bill, and the schedules and other devices are the means to carry it out. They have a perfectly logical basis.

The Shopping Hours Reform Council's proposals on worker protection are interesting. We have heard from some hon. Members, including from the Opposition Front Bench, that there is common ground that there should be full worker protection. That is not so. It depends whom one considers to be workers. There are even amendments before us today to remove anyone engaged in any management task from all employee protection. In its unadulterated form, the Bill would protect all grades and types of employee, including managers. And why not? What is it about management staff in retailing that makes them neither need nor deserve support and protection? I speak now for my union and as the president of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers as well as the Member of Parliament for Preston. I make it clear that all grades and types of staff join trade unions because they realise that they need protection, and the House should realise that, too.

The Shopping Hours Reform Council offers no protection for workers in Scotland, yet they need it even more than workers in England, because there is more Sunday trading in Scotland. The Bill, as it emerged from Committee, extends employee protection to Scotland. Everybody who is genuinely in favour of employee protection should vote for the Bill on that ground if on no other. Certainly all Scottish Members with the interests of shop workers at heart should vote for it.

The Shopping Hours Reform Council would not protect Sunday-only workers. That is deplorable, but, of course, it is part of the pattern of the results of deregulation and partial deregulation, which increase casualisation and increase the number of workers with no rights, no security and no status who work for peanuts. The fact that the Shopping Hours Reform Council would exclude those people from protection is typical. There would also be no guarantee of any protection for remuneration. The Bill enshrines the principle of double time on a Sunday and that provision went through Committee unanimously, without amendment. If members of the Committee were so worried about the Bill, why did not they table suitable amendments then? They accepted the provisions for employment protection and the Bill, unlike new clause 14, is specific about double time. In case anybody thinks that that is a daring and innovative idea, I must tell the House that double time in retailing on a Sunday was guaranteed in law until 1986. Nor was it removed from the law because of any pressure from employers or from the public. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers continues to have agreements with various employers which still enshrine double time. Of course, there is some Sunday working in retailing even without Sunday trading. There is stocktaking and preparatory work to do and that is why agreements mention pay and protection on Sunday.

What would happen if the deregulators got their way or if the Shopping Hours Reform Council got its way? Retailing is already a cut-throat business, so the main brunt of the competitive pressure would fall on the work force. That is why it is vital to have protection spelt out and vital not to have a high street Sunday which would even brush aside legal protection. I am not interested in lip service to worker protection. I am interested in real protection, in money, in the voluntary principle and in the protection of all grades of workers throughout the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) talked about the Transport and General Workers Union and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Workers Union. She says that they do not like the Bill and that they are consulting their members. It is a pity that they did not consult their members before they gave advice to hon. Members. We in USDAW have just had an annual delegate meeting with representatives of every branch of the union, which is by far the largest union in retailing, and it was solidly behind the Bill. We are the union which, above all others, organises shop workers. We understand retailing and we know what would happen with a high street Sunday.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: No. The hon. Member has intervened repeatedly this morning and never to good account.

Mr. Fabricant: I want to redeem myself.

Mrs. Wise: The hon. Gentleman is beyond redemption.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was even more generous than my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore in tabling his amendment and I understand why perfectly. I will certainly protect his reputation.

The deregulators do not even pay lip service to workers' protection; they are for "anything goes" and they welcome the Prime Minister's statement that the present law of the land is bizarre. It ill becomes Ministers to complain if local authorities find it difficult to enforce the law when they create such an atmosphere.

I will not resist the Second Reading of the new clause, but I will certainly resist the amendment and I will certainly fiercely resist any suggestion that the new clause should stand part of the Bill, as should anybody who is interested in keeping Sunday special and who has any concern for women workers who overwhelmingly staff our shops. When some people in the House talk about women, they seem to have a blind spot for the women who work on the check-outs, who fill the shelves and who do not want to work on a Sunday, but who want proper pay and conditions for the other days of the week. Nobody can tell us that there is no time during the week, with 12-hour shopping days in many cases, to shop. Anybody who can organise his or her time properly can find time to shop.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I listened with interest to the speech made by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who said that, as president of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, she could confirm that USDAW was the largest union of shopworkers. What she did not tell the House was that nine shopworkers out of 10 choose not to be members of USDAW.

We have been asked to state our interest in this debate. I can do so succinctly. I believe in the maximum freedom of choice. I also believe that the burden of bureaucratic intervention on industry and commerce should be reduced. Unfortunately, the Bill seeks to increase the level of bureaucratic intervention in commerce. Much more important, it seeks to deny freedom. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said that his wife was quite capable of organising her week so that she did not have to shop on Sunday. Good for her. No one is asking her to shop on Sunday. But I do not believe that the fact that Mrs. Burns does not want to shop on Sunday is a reason why I should not shop on Sunday or a good reason for preventing supermarkets from opening on Sunday.

We have listened this morning to some of the most arrant twaddle possible. We have heard the supermarkets described as the lawbreakers, as if every other retailer behaved legally on Sundays. I remind the House that 95 per cent. of shops that open on this coming Sunday will be trading illegally. It is not just the supermarkets that trade illegally: every corner shop that sells a can of baked beans, a packet of cod fish fingers—no doubt made in Grimsby——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marshall: —or even a packet of sugar, or that rents out a video is trading illegally. We are also talking about every DIY centre that sells Miss Rumbold some cement and every garden centre that is open this Sunday. It is quite wrong of hon. Members to say that they are fighting a battle against the lawbreakers. They are selective as to the lawbreakers against whom they are fighting the battle and they are ignoring the fact that the first shops to break the law on a Sunday were not the supermarket chains but small traders and that the supermarkets have merely caught up——

Mrs. Ann Winterton: If I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument, he will welcome the fact that he has before him a Bill on which he can vote which will prevent the delay in a new law being enacted and enforced and will prevent the free-for-all before Christmas, which is such a disgrace to the Government whom I support, who purport to be the Government of law and order.

Mr. Marshall: I do not welcome the Bill because it is bureaucratic. What is worse, it seems to embody an obsessive dislike of supermarkets, as if sin sat on the supermarket shelf.

We should welcome the fact that we have one of the most efficient retailing industries in the world. I should like at this point to do something that I have not done since I became a Member of the House and pay tribute to the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir. E. Heath). The Retail Prices Act 1964, which my right hon. Friend introduced, has enabled Britain to have such an efficient retailing system.

Our supermarkets offer cheap prices and wide choice. The Bill would close them on Sundays. New clause 10 offers them a ray of hope. Some of the supporters of the Bill are the self-satisfied, the sanctimonious, the well paid and the well fed, who seek to make life less convenient and more expensive for my constituents.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman is a passionate supporter of Sunday working. Does his support extend to Sunday working by Members of Parliament? Would he advocate that the House of Commons should normally work on a Sunday?

Mr. Marshall: Those of my constituents who know me well know that I frequently work in my constituency on Sunday morning, afternoon and evening. Many organisations will confirm that I am happy to attend meetings on Sundays if I am asked to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman is making a rod for his own back.

Mr. Marshall: I am not a part-timer like the hon. Gentleman, who suddenly appears at 12.30 pm on a Friday. He is such a part-timer that he refuses to serve on Standing Committees and lectures the rest of us on the fact that we do too much work.

Mr. Skinner: As a matter of fact, I was on a Standing Committee only last week, so the hon. Gentleman is totally wrong. As for being a part-timer, I voted in 98 per cent. of the votes in the last Session of Parliament and in 96 per cent. of the votes in another Session. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would check his record, which is probably similar to the average for other hon. Members—about 50 per cent. He should not talk to me about being a part-timer when he is lining his pockets with other jobs.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) continues, I hope that we will return to the two clauses under consideration and that matters will not get too personal. It would not be unparliamentary to discuss personal matters, but I do not like it. We should be discussing issues, not personalities.

1 pm

Mr. Marshall: I agree, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some people incite one into straying down the ways of misguided thoughts—I will try not to yield to temptation. To err is human: to forgive, divine.

Recently, I visited two shops in my constituency. One was Food Giant, which would be closed on Sundays by the Bill, and the other was 7-Eleven, which would be allowed to trade on Sundays. That is why I regard the new clause as important. The House may like to know the cost of some of the commodities on that shopping expedition. I wanted to buy a pint of semi-skimmed milk, because I am conscious of the need to keep weight under control. It cost 25p at Food Giant and 38p at 7-Eleven. I wanted to buy a loaf of Mother's Pride bread—it was 29p at Food Giant and 71p at 7-Eleven. I wanted to buy some Nescafe—it was £1·29 at Food Giant and £1·79 at 7-Eleven.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) thought that his fish would not be mentioned. But I wanted to buy some fish fingers made in Grimsby. They were £1·15 for 10 at Food Giant and £1·89 at 7-Eleven —a difference on first-class Bird's Eye fish fingers of 74p. That is a high rate of valued added tax to impose to keep the Sunday sabatarian conscience. I thought that if I were eating all that food, I should brush my teeth. What was the cost of oral hygiene? A tube of Aquafresh was £1·29 at Food Giant and £1·95 at 7-Eleven.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Can I buy shares in Food Giant?

Mr. Marshall: Food Giant is not the most prosperous retailing group, but it is getting a free plug this morning. For a basket of well-known basic commodities and foodstuffs, the cost at Food Giant was £14·28. That shop would be closed down by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), who talked about the need for pensioners, single-parent families and widows to have a better deal. He would close down Food Giant at £14·28 and give 7-Eleven a licence to open at £19·56. I suggest that the cost of all that to the average family could be as much as £500 a year. That is from an hon. Member who objects to the imposition of VAT on fuel. The cost of the Bill to many families would be much greater than the cost of the imposition of VAT on heating and lighting.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: The hon. Gentleman voted for that.

Mr. Marshall: I know that the hon. Lady's husband voted against the imposition of VAT on fuel but she did not vote against it, so she is caught out by her own intervention.

It is accepted by people that supermarkets are relatively inexpensive and popular. Indeed, on Sunday, more people will shop in the supermarkets of England than listen to the vicars of the Church of England preach. We must ask ourselves what right we have to say to the people of the United Kingdom that they are wrong and we are right.

Lord Randolph Churchill, the great-grandfather of my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), told the Tory party to trust the people. Those of us who support a liberalisation of the law say, "Trust the people; the people will decide whether they want to shop on Sunday." They should be given that choice.

Those who say that they want to change the law and keep Sunday special forget that Sunday will not be kept special by legislative fiat. Sunday will be kept special out of conviction. When I was young, my family and I used to walk around the streets of Dundee on a Sunday because that was what we wanted to do. We did not want to stop in the shops that could legally trade on Sunday in Scotland.

When I go around my constituency tomorrow afternoon, I shall see walking around Hendon Jewish family after Jewish family. Why do they walk around Hendon as a family on a Saturday? It is not because a law of the land says that they cannot go and shop. It is because, out of conviction, they do not want to shop on Shabbat. That is surely the way to keep Sunday special.

The way to keep Sunday special is for the Church of England to have a message for the people. The Church of England should ask itself why its pews are full on Christmas eve and on Christmas day and why they are not full for the other 363 days of the year. If it could answer that question, there would be no need for legislation on Sunday trading. But it cannot. People want to shop on a Sunday and they should be free to do so.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: If today's debate on new clauses 14 and 10 demonstrates anything, it is the need for Government legislation on Sunday trading. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has made a brave attempt, and I congratulate him on all the effort and hard work that has gone into it. But it has proved that to legislate on issues of conscience is beyond the resources of the Back Bencher and the resources allowed to back private Members' legislation.

The problem is that out of the good intentions of the legislation we have ended up with a mess; we have ended up with a dog's breakfast. We have ended up with Ogmore pie half baked as it has been presented to the House today. The Bill started with a simple, single, clear-cut objective. It has ended up with a mess. My hon. Friend is now attempting to pull the plug on that mess by means of new clause 14 which, I understand, he intends to vote against. That is an incomprehensible way to legislate on Sunday trading.

My hon. Friend started with a virtuous vestal virgin of a Bill and has ended up with not total but semi-promiscuity. The Bill cannot be totally promiscuous because of the long title of the Bill. At the end of the long evolution of the vestal virgin into a semi-harlot, my hon. Friend shoots her by tabling new clause 14. It does not make sense to proceed in that fashion. It shows the difficulties which face private Members in legislating on topics as controversial as shopping on Sundays.

If the Committee has done anything, it has given us a huge demonstration of the problem and has been a learning process. It has turned out highly trained neurotics, but it has gone a long way to explaining how difficult such legislation is.

We have heard all the arguments about Sunday trading. The debate on the new clause has been in some measure a Second Reading debate. Yesterday, I was reading Peter Paterson's book on Lord George-Brown entitled "Tired and Emotional", which is presumably how the members of the Standing Committee ended up. It gives the example of Lord George-Brown as Minister of Works in 1950-51 opening the Tower of London on Sundays.

All the stock arguments came out. People said that there was no demand to have the Tower of London open on Sundays. They said that the Beefeaters wanted to go to

church and the sermons sometimes overran. They said that the Beefeaters must have a hot dinner on Sundays. They said that the Beefeaters must be able to take their children to the countryside or the seaside on Sundays. All the arguments against the Sunday opening of the Tower of London have been repeated today.

At the end of the debate, we must decide on new clause 14. It would be much preferable to make an immediate decision on new clause 10, which is a more realistic solution to the problems posed by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore started out with a simple principle designed to stop shopping on Sundays—the basic principle of the Keep Sunday Special campaign. One would think that it was possible to legislate for a simple principle, but people then offer various exceptions to it. What about wet fish, for instance, about which more perceptive Members have argued? As soon as one enshrines a simple principle, everyone comes along with a list of exceptions.

The Bill started with a simple principle, but an increasing number of loopholes have been allowed in it. That list of exceptions is open to many mistakes, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore has already admitted, many gaps will have to be filled in the House of Lords. New clause 10, tabled by my hon. Friend, allows for that as part of the legislative process.

One can never get a perfect list of exemptions and those that we have ended up with seem to be male-oriented. As has already been remarked upon, there are many things for the boys, the lads, to do on Sunday. They can go to the DIY, get the motor spares and go down to the garage. There is not much for the girls, the women, to do, except to stay at home and cook the dinner for the lads to arrive back, drunk, loaded down with motor spares and DIY equipment to start cutting up their wives, the joint, or whatever on a Sunday.

The exemptions will be allowed under an extremely bureaucratic procedure. People must register and prove that 80 per cent. of the business is in the specified, exempt categories. Those registrations must be processed within a month, but there is no suggestion about who will pay for that. Newsagents, for example, who have traded on Sundays for years, will have to go through that formal procedure to prove that they are fit to be exempt. We have ended up with a Bill that no longer keeps Sunday special; it does not even keep it semi-special, because it will be left in a mess.

Mr. Dowd: Does my hon. Friend agree that KSS no longer means keeping Sunday special but keeping supermarkets shut?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) continues, may I remind the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) that he should address me and not the Bench behind him.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the weakness in the argument about protecting pay and conditions. Those terms will be protected by firing workers in supermarkets who want to work on a Sunday. The Bill will deprive them of that opportunity and it will, in the end, result in lost jobs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): In the mid-1980s, I was the junior Minister responsible for this issue, when 4 million people worked regularly on Sundays and 4 million others worked part-time or occasionally on a Sunday. Not a single one sent a single letter of complaint to his or her Member of Parliament which was then passed to me.

Mr. Mitchell: That bears out my experience of talking to shop workers—they want to work on Sunday. They do not feel that they will be discriminated against if they do not work on a Sunday, but the great majority of them want to work on that day to earn extra money. It also gives them the opportunity to arrange their working week to suit their family circumstances. The father could stay at home on Sunday, for example, to look after the kids while the wife was working.

Ms Janet Anderson: The big four supermarkets employ 57,000 shop workers every Sunday, the vast majority of whom are women. In 1992 alone, they earned, between them, £100 million.

Mr. Mitchell: I want to encourage that process, but I do not feel that the Bill does so. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

It is as if my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore realised the impossibility of succeeding with the Bill and decided, at the last minute, to throw in what he calls an opportunity to debate the three options, even though he will vote against all three. However, we are not debating the three options that the Government will advance. We are certainly not debating total deregulation. How could we when the Bill's long title states that it is to

"Provide for a general prohibition on the opening on Sunday of shops for retail trade or business"?

1.15 pm

We are not even debating what is, for me and for most Opposition Members, the central issue: the pay and the regulation of labour conditions necessary for working on Sunday. Under the Bill, we cannot debate that subject because to do so we would have to reject new clause 14—under which we were supposed to debate the options—and go back to the Bill itself, which is incomprehensible. The procedure is unsatisfactory and we cannot even have a proper discussion. How can it be said that we can have a proper discussion in the House of Commons when we have an attendance such as we have today and when hon. Members knew only at the last minute that we were to debate the alternatives?

Therefore, I conclude that the procedure turns what was a mess into a farce, and the House of Commons should not be asked to decide on it. It is essential that we wait for the Government's measures. I am sorry that their proposals are so belated. The Government have been dilatory and could not make up their minds about what to do. However, the only way is to use the authority of Government, with the backing of the research available to them and their legislative powers, to discuss the three choices and come to a decision.

Ultimately, even this place and the Government have to maintain certain standards on legislation. The Bill falls well below the standards even of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and the abolition of pit bull terriers Bill—the previous dogs' breakfasts that we have approved in the House. We cannot legislate on a principle that starts simple and ends up a mess, then attempt to salvage it by way of a new clause.

What are we to do? The only option is to support new clause 10, with which I agree, but which is irrelevant if the

Bill is to flounder, and abstain on new clause 14. We would then await the Government's proposals and opt for the principle of regulated liberalisation, as my own union, the GMB, and the Shopping Hours Reform Council are urging us to do.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have listened to the debate with great interest. I shall first refer to the Minister's response—if one can call it a response. The people of this country will be alarmed that the Government were unable to make an unequivocal statement to the effect that those who have to work on Sundays will be protected by safeguards if deregulation is introduced. The Minister was silent when pressure was placed on him by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and he was asked for a clear statement. We must take note of his reluctance. Surely the Government should uphold the principle that those people who do not wish to work on Sunday due to their convictions are given adequate protection. Such protection has not been afforded them by the shops that have been breaking the law.

A lady who is a member of my congregation works in a large store in the centre of Belfast which gives 50 per cent. discounts to all its workers—but that discount has been withdrawn from those who do not work on Sunday. If that is not discrimination and intimidation I do not know what is.

The Minister must make it clear where the Government stand on this issue. He says that we will vote on three separate matters, but he has not told the House whether we will be allowed a proper vote. Which vote will be taken first? Will the other two issues then fall?

The Minister has also told us that we will be given explanations of the reasons for the various proposals. Will he allow those opposed to Sunday opening to explain their position? Will he ask people who believe in partial opening to submit an explanation of their position? He is certainly quite capable of writing out his own explanation. What standing will these various explanations be given?

I believe that the Government are conniving at getting rid of all Sunday regulation. They want another Christmas, with all the large shops open. They will say that everyone wants that. They are putting off the day, however, because that suits them—the Government want as much time as possible.

Mr. Alton: The Minister has still not made it clear to us—perhaps he will take the opportunity to intervene on the hon. Gentleman—whether the Government will introduce a Bill in the Queen's Speech in the autumn. He said only that they intend to introduce a Bill, but he did not specificically mention the Queen's Speech.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I thought that I heard the Minister say something about the Queen's Speech, but I shall allow him to intervene.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We shall introduce a Bill in the autumn. Most Bills introduced in the autumn are listed in the Queen's Speech. I do not write that speech, but I can say that the Government have decided that there will be such a Bill.

Mr. Skinner: Still a bit vague.

Rev. Ian Paisley: We will see how the Government proceed, but we are certainly not hearing any firm commitment from the Government about the rights of workers and how they will be protected. That is the foundation on which they should build.

If the Government deregulate Sunday, will they then consider the day the same as any other working day? Do they believe that people who work on Sunday should be paid the same rate as they would be on another day? We need to know the Government's attitude.

I do not know whether any hon. Member lives beside one of these supermarkets, but many of my constituents do. The supermarkets are often built in areas where people live in their rows of houses. We have had a great deal of representation from them about the troubles with traffic, trolleys and congestion. Now Sunday will go the same way; but people should be allowed a breather, one day when they can escape traffic congestion and not be bothered by trolleys and the hustle and bustle of people shopping.

I listened with amazement to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who said that the Bill's supporters want to close shops. They want nothing of the kind. They want to close them on a Sunday, that is all. Anyone listening to the hon. Gentleman would have thought that the Bill's sponsors are trying to close down shops for ever. Not so; if people want to shop in them, they can certainly go on doing so. The hon. Gentleman spoke as though he were pleading for ordinary working people, but ordinary working people, the elderly and those who are busy cannot go to the supermarkets. The local independent shops supply them.

I draw attention to the findings of a Royal Town Planning Institute working party. In its paper, it said:

"Those who are disadvantaged by reason of poverty, who do not have access to a car, and who therefore are dependent on existing local and neighbourhood shops cannot easily take advantage of the facilities of the distant superstore. There is widespread concern that these disadvantaged consumers will increasingly suffer from double deprivation caused by lack of access to the advantageous, convenient and efficient forms of retailing combined with dependence on deteriorating quality, prices and choice in neighbourhood shops."

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No, I will not give way because time is short and others may wish to take part.

Independent local shops are important to the very fabric of society and they form a focus for the community. They are not impersonal like the big stores. That is why it is important that we get our priorities right. I welcome the fact that today we can vote on the three main issues. Now is the time to do that. It has been put off for far too long. Let us have it today.

If people did not think it worth while turning up for the debate today, that is their fault. Hon. Members may have been discouraged from attending, but if those who want a free vote to sort our Sunday trading in a complete sweep do not have their followers here, that is their business. We have to vote today. That is the job that we are called to do. If we do not make ourselves acquainted with the business of the House, that is our business. We have to vote on the issue and show what the House of Commons wants. I am glad that, in the previous vote, hon. Members representing Ulster pointed the way.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put:

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 119, Noes 13.

Division No. 268] **[1.27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hoey, Kate
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Oiner, William
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. John Spellar.

NOES

Ashby, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Devlin, Tim
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Gardiner, Sir George
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Rathbone, Tim
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Whittingdale, John

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Marshall and
Mr. Michael Fabricant.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 9.

Division No. 269] **[1.40 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hoey, Kate
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S.
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Oiner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Thomason, Roy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

NOES

Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Skinner, Dennis
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Ward, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Marshall and
Mr. Michael Fabricant.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) proposed to the proposed clause, in line 15, leave out subsection (3).—*[Mr. Bennett.]*

Question put, That the amendment to the proposed clause be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 127.

Division No. 270] **[1.51 pm**

AYES

Ashby, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Gardiner, Sir George
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Sims, Roger
Stern, Michael
Thomason, Roy
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Marshall and
Mr. Peter Bottomley.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hoey, Kate
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S.
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Oiner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Ms Ann Coffey.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 124.

Division No. 271] **[2.03 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Devlin, Tim
Gardiner, Sir George
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Thomason, Roy
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Marshall and
Mr. Michael Fabricant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hoey, Kate
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S.
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oiner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stern, Michael
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis

Vaz, Keith	Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*	Wise, Audrey
Wicks, Malcolm	
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*	**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and**
Winnick, David	**Mr. Alan Meale.**

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You were in the Chair when the votes were taken on a contentious issue that could clarify whether or not Parliament is in favour of the proposals of the Shopping Hours Reform Council, total deregulation or the proposals in my Bill. The wish of the House has been made clear beyond any shadow of doubt by the last vote of 124 for to 13 against. Even more votes were cast against total deregulation, as one would expect. In the debate, one of my hon. Friends said that we had failed to find anyone who totally agreed with total deregulation to append his or her signature to the amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said that he would table an amendment so that a vote could be taken. This is a democracy, we are meeting on a Friday and every one of the 651 Members of Parliament has been informed that the debate is to take place today. Therefore, bearing in mind the decisions taken this afternoon, will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, accept a motion from me that we should now proceed to take the Third Reading of my Bill? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Where is the democracy —hon. Members cannot even accept a decision when——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make a speech. I understood his point of order and my answer is an unequivocal no. Madam Speaker has made her selection of new clauses and amendments. It is my duty to ensure that they are debated within the necessary constraints of time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that this is a different point of order.

Mr. Bottomley: It certainly is. I have been a Member for some time and I think that I have heard the occupant of the Chair give guidance on occasion that Members' votes are expected to follow their speeches. We have had two debates—one on amendment (a) and one on new clause 14. I think that those who moved the amendment and the new clause may not have voted for them. I should be grateful for your guidance on the conventions of the House and whether they merely provide guidance or are supposed to be adhered to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The rule is not quite as the hon. Gentleman thinks. The rule refers to the voice, when giving tongue to aye or no—not an actual speech. Those are the two factors that must go together. For example, an hon. Member could give a speech in favour of a measure and then vote against it.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I appeal to you in your role as defender of the traditions of the House and of the rights of Back Benchers. Has not the sad saga of the passage of this Bill shown the extent to which the Executive rules the procedures of this House and to which the will of Back Benchers has become as nothing? We have become nothing but ciphers. The clear will of the House is that there should be progress on the lines of the Bill, but the Government and their friends have, by this manoeuvre, ensured that there will be more lawbreaking for at least another 12 months. Surely time should be allowed for the will of the House to prevail over the will of the Government, who are conniving at the continuation of lawbreaking.

Madam Deputyn Speaker: I am afraid that these are not matters over and for which the Chair has any control or responsibility.

Mr. Cormack: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would you be prepared to discuss with Madam Speaker the implications not just of these votes but of the time allocated to Bills which manifestly enjoy the support of an overwhelming majority of the House, as demonstrated in the decisive Second Reading vote? I put it to you that in cases such as this it should be possible to work out a procedure to provide time. After all, in percentage terms the Bill had as decisive a majority on Second Reading as any Bill of recent years.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have no doubt that Madam Speaker, who assiduously follows the proceedings of the Chamber, will be aware of what has been said today; but I remind the hon. Gentleman that these are precisely matters for consideration by the Procedure Committee, which was set up to deal with difficulties and disputes of this kind.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I might be permitted to provide a helpful solution to the dilemma. Given this overwhelming majority, it is more than likely that some people who have tabled amendments might decide not to move them. I should be grateful for your confirmation that that is possible. If they did not move them, we could move on to a formal Third Reading and the Bill could go to the Lords. If those who have tabled the amendments do not withdraw them, I fear that outsiders will come to the conclusion that those who are not willing to co-operate in this way are influenced by the big vested interests of the multinationals, which are lawbreakers themselves. I hate to see members of the law and order party in conspiracy with concerted lawbreakers such as B and Q and all the rest of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There is no dilemma for me here. We shall not find out whether people are willing not to move their amendments unless we proceed to do so.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a new Member of the House, may I ask whether it is usual to be given only three days' notice that issues as important as these are to be debated?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If it were not in order, it would not have been permitted.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Over the years the Government have time after time—yesterday was a classic example of this—broadened Bills to encompass matters well outside their long titles, although technically they may have come within the titles. Is not it sad that no way can be found to enable the House to exercise its will at this stage? It seems that everything depends on Ministers and on the Government's business managers, operating

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

through the usual channels. Surely, if this is a democracy —I sometimes think that, regrettably, it is an elective dictatorship—we can find a way to ensure that the will and the spirit of the House and the country bring to an end a scandal and a shame that has continued for many years. If we cannot do that, we might as well all pack our bags and go home.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a lamentation with which I am familiar, but it is not my responsibility. Once again, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Stern: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that, in discussing with Madam Speaker the issues arising out of the debate and proceedings on the Bill, you will draw her attention to two factors that have long-term implications for private Members' Bills. The first is the apparent ability of certain hon. Members to bully through support for a measure by reason of their position. The second is what happened today, when a long line of speakers spoke in support of a new clause against which they then voted.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have nothing to add to the points that I have already made.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that, in the terms of the procedure of the House, there is nothing to prevent the Leader of the House from making time available to deal with the 99 amendments and new clauses in the name of the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) and the other amendments? It might assist in the process that the Minister described earlier—of the Government having established that the will of the House is broadly in favour of one route, not deregulation or that described by the SHRC—if the Government would use their time to proceed in the matter. As the Leader of the House is not here, will you confirm that it is open to him to do that?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to offer advice to the Leader of the House. However, I have no doubt that the right hon. Member can communicate directly with the Leader of the House.

Mr. John Marshall: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank you for standing up for the rights of Back Benchers who wish to debate the issues. It is wrong that the Chamber should be used as a constitutional steamroller, as the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) wanted. We have a right to debate the issues and he should not have interfered. Is not it an absurdity that we have been debating a new clause, proposed by the hon. Gentleman, against which he then voted?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have no further observation on that point. I have made it already.

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker. In a recent statement from the Chair, Madam Speaker acceped for debate two hotly contested amendments to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. In doing so, she said that they were incompatible and that if the House voted in favour of one of the amendments, there could be no vote on the other. Can you now rule, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how many of the remaining amendments on the amendment paper are incompatible with the decisions that have been taken by the House on the Bill today?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not offer views in advance of consideration of amendments.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have received several hundred cards from people writing in favour of restricting Sunday trading and several hundred from people opposed to Sunday trading. I have six cards sent to me by people both opposed and in favour. In view of the confusion throughout the country that that shows, I urge you to ask the Government to bring forward a Bill or a mechanism as soon as possible because many people obviously wish to have the matter resolved at a time when all hon. Members are here to decide on it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I wonder sometimes whether people actually hear what I say. I have said that the proper procedure is to go to the Procedure Committee, which is set up to deal with just such problems.

Mr. Alison: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I were now to propose, That the Bill be now read the Third time, it is clear in the light of what you said earlier that you would have to reply that you could not accept my proposal, because amendments on the order paper would have to be called. Given that the time factor now makes it impossible for any amendment to be called, I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I must decline to propose the Question.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Lest those outside the House misunderstand your ruling, will you confirm that the matters that you say will be dealt with by the Procedure Committee will, in fact, be dealt with by a Committee dominated by Government supporters appointed by Whips who are in favour of rejecting the Bill? In what sense does the Procedure Committee provide a remedy for the problem that we encounter today?

It being half-past Two o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Remaining Private Member's Bills

RIGHT TO KNOW BILL

Order for consideration, as amended in the Standing Committee, read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Friday 2 July.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

As amended, considered; read the Third time, and passed.

MEDICINES INFORMATION BILL

Order for further consideration, as amended in the Standing Committee, read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be further considered on Friday 2 July.

TRANSACTIONS WITH TAX HAVENS (SANCTIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

RACIAL VIOLENCE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 9 July.

TOBACCO ADVERTISING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

DECLARATION OF WAR (REQUIREMENT FOR PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

HOMICIDE (DEFENCE OF PROVOCATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

WEDDINGS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

HARE COURSING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not hear an objection.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Unfortunately—from the hon. Gentleman's point of view—I did.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

LANDLORD AND TENANT (COVENANTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Noting the objection of the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), Friday 2 July, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Do you realise that the Bill to which an objection has been made was debated for some seven hours——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the House cannot debate the merits or otherwise of the Bill.

Mr. Powell: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am referring not to the merits of the Bill, but to the fact that a private Member's Bill intended to help disabled people was debated for seven hours, and cannot now be debated further on the Floor of the House because an objection has been made.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, our procedures do not allow us to discuss that point.

ENERGY (FAIR COMPETITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [12 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 2 July.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the Second Reading of the Bill, the closure motion was carried by 78 votes to nil. This Bill has been killed off by two Tellers and the Government Whip. The House should take account of that in terms of its procedure.

PENSIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 July.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Resolved,

That,

(1) this House do meet on Thursday 27th May at half-past Nine o'clock;

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 17 (Time for taking questions), no Questions shall be taken, provided that at Eleven o'clock the Speaker may interrupt the proceedings in order to permit Questions to be asked which are in her opinion of an urgent character and relate either to matters of public importance or to the arrangement of business, statements to be made by Ministers, or personal explanations to be made by Members; and

(3) at Three o'clock the Speaker do adjourn the House without putting any Question, provided that this House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Deregulation and Privatisation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): It was interesting to note in the previous debate how the will of the House was manifested in favour of the Government not rushing into out-and-out deregulation. In that case, it was the highly important subject of Sunday trading. I was a supporter of the Shops (Amendment) Bill throughout its various stages. That particular process may now have lapsed, but I am sure that we shall return later to that agonising debate. It is one aspect of the importance of avoiding rushing into out-and-out deregulation that I wish to raise today.

I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Technology for coming here to reply in this Adjournment debate. As he has just returned from an important visit overseas, I am even more grateful to him for being on the Treasury Bench today—although I know he will not mind my saying, given the importance of the subject, that at least the Minister for Industry, if not the President of the Board of Trade, should have been on duty to respond to the debate.

Although it is an Adjournment debate, there is, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, a respectable tradition in the House that matters of overriding political importance —not just local or marginal matters reflecting the particular interests of the Member concerned—can be raised on the Adjournment. I wish to air a big national subject, and that is a convenient way of doing it.

I did not select a Friday for this debate, although I am grateful to the Chair for having done so. If the debate had taken place in the Monday to Thursday period, more attention might have been paid to it. I hope that the press will give publicity to the subject, for it will become part of a significant debate in the months to come. Lest my hon. Friend the Minister thinks that I am growing excessively radical in, perhaps, the wrong sense, bearing in mind the last few years of political developments under a Conservative Government, I wish to reassure him that that is far from the case. All that I am doing is espousing the idea of a return to the commonsense, middle ground of British politics, which is particularly necessary in this matter.

The subject for debate on the Adjournment of the House are deregulation and privatisation but, if I may, I shall take them in reverse order. I have to declare a direct interest as the founder shareholder of a company in the City that has been involved in virtually all the successful privatisations that have been carried out by the Government since 1979, beginning with the first tranche of the British Telecom shares issue, followed by the privatisation of British Gas and other nationalised industries. It is true to say that, both pragmatically and objectively, it has been a successful programme, the effects of which, in most cases, have been beneficial to the economy. Most people, even Opposition Members, would agree, with that conclusion.

The programme has not been successful in all respects. In practical terms, the effects have not always been quite what was expected. For instance, in real terms, electricity is now more expensive as a consequence of privatisation than it was before, so privatisation has not always worked exactly in the way that we hoped. None the less, the

overwhelming conclusion must be that it has been a success. Bearing that in mind, the irony of my suggestion is that we should have second thoughts now. This country has privatised more industries than any other country in the occidental world and elsewhere. The argument now, I believe, is that we should have serious second thoughts about further privatisation.

I pay tribute to our deceased colleague, the hon. Member for Christchurch, for his work on the railways, which are a good example of where the Government should have second thoughts and pause to ensure that we get the structures and the legislation right. I share the anxieties and fears of many people, including many loyal Conservatives, that we shall get it wrong for the sake of the inevitable, inexorable pressure of previous ideology, at a time when the era of Thatcherism has been fading away and should continue to fade away rapidly. I hope that we are returning to mainstream central conservatism for a long time ahead.

Robert Adley, whom we in the House lament, had a number of important points to make on the subject, not least in the report of the Select Committee on Transport. The Railways Bill has been amended in Committee with few second thoughts, which is a pity. I hope that there will be an opportunity for the Department of Transport and other parts of government to think carefully before rushing into an ill-considered, complicated structure for the sake of old ideological pressures that will not be in accordance with modern practical realities. A limited number of franchises, but only a few, may eventually be awarded to outside applicants, but I should like to see the essential component maintained so that British Rail is involved as an original applicant in its own right, subject to the final structure of the track authority and franchisers.

We are apparently approaching the final sell-off in British Telecom shares. Is it right for the Government, for old-fashioned, out-of-date ideological reasons, automatically to say that they must sell off the remaining shares? Why not keep 10 to 15 per cent. in public hands, bearing in mind the strategic and security aspects of telecommunications, which is a legitimate argument? Why should not the Government maintain and conserve a successful commercial investment that has done very well and would provide an interesting commercial sector dividend for the Treasury?

The main reason I urge second thoughts on privitisation and deregulation is the apparently upcoming privatisation of the Post Office. Even right-wing colleagues in the House and in the parliamentary Conservative party are having serious second thoughts about the arguments for Post Office privatisation. Again, I use the word deliberately in the conventional sense of privatisation in structural terms, but other parameters may be considered in the future. I hope so. I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry and the President of the Board of Trade will be open minded on the issue. I am encouraged by the delays that appear to be occuring. My hon. Friend the Minister has had hearings with people outside, with colleagues in the House and, I am sure, with Opposition Members. I remember that years ago we both rebelled against the abolition of the Greater London Council, so I am sure that he is not the kind of person to be an unthinking supporter of the Centre for Policy Studies and its old arguments and ideological nostrums, which have now been bypassed by the passage of time and by the return to pragmatic Conservative common sense.

The public want this Conservative Government, whom they re-elected last year—I was as delighted about that as my hon. Friend the Minister—to concentrate on the revival and recovery of the British economy, the revival and reconstruction of our essential social services and a return to common sense in education policy. They do not want us to go on at excessive length about old pre-occupations with old-fashioned ideology on privatisation, particularly when it clearly is not necessary for the Post Office.

Future structures may be needed because Post Office management, supported by employees and, I am sure, unions, would like the Post Office to be free to go into the marketplace for future investment and capital requirements, which it cannot do at the moment because of the shackles of Treasury control and the need for a minimum return.

All sorts of options can be considered and I certainly advocate the idea of a public corporation with the Government still involved through, perhaps, a minority shareholding—such as with British Telecom, if the Government do not sell their remaining shares. An employee-management buy-out might be the right way forward. That would offer the freedom that we saw in the successful privatisation of the National Freight Corporation, which represented popular capitalism at its best, with amazingly successful results. Van drivers with the NFC now have £150,000 of capital or more, and as a result they are as addicted as my hon. Friend and I to the modern welfare capitalist system.

That may be the approach. However, the old-fashioned idea of a sell-off for its own sake, simply because the Treasury still needs money to reduce the deficit, is depressingly familiar. It is otiose and out of date for a unique body that is part of the public sector in a real sense and also has links with the Crown which have to be borne in mind in the future.

My final comments—I want to give my hon. Friend a chance to reply—will be about deregulation. We now use that term in two senses, which causes a certain amount of confusion. Although I am in favour of it, I am not thinking primarily today of deregulation in the sense of a bonfire of controls. In fact, despite the fact that I am a supporter of the bonfire of controls and of getting rid of excessive red tape and bureaucracy, as anyone with common sense would be—I suppose that it would be a wider part of the citizens charter—I find it slightly amusing that the Government are now relaunching that as a policy although we have been in power since 1979. I thought that we were supposed to have done it before. I am thinking more of deregulation in areas such as the Sunday trading legislation that the House debated earlier, in which the Government could still be tempted to say that they remained, empirically, out-and-out deregulators, if that is not a contradiction in terms—I sometimes think that it is. That would be a great pity.

I shall raise two points to which it may be difficult for my hon. Friend to respond, as they are not in the province and ambit of his Department—but no doubt we can both consult our colleagues in other parts of the Government later. As a London Member, I wish to refer specifically to deregulation plans for London buses and black taxi cabs. I apologise for the fact that, because my hon. Friend was abroad, I could not give him notice that I intended to raise that subject, too.

[Mr. Hugh Dykes]

In terms of deregulation as a general principle, the time has come when we can return to pragmatic, sensible, middle-of-the-road Macmillan-type Conservatism. I hope that, as we have been assured discreetly and privately by our colleagues, that is a genuine return by the Government to common sense and to the centre ground. I therefore hope that deregulation will no longer be a central plank of our policy in general terms. I feel strongly that deregulation of the buses in London would be a disaster. All the evidence points to such a policy being quite wrong. The present limited contract franchise system is adequate and successful for London.

We do not, of course, contemplate deregulating the tube, which would be rather a difficult matter to engineer, I presume, as there is no intrinsic competition that one could create alongside tube trains. We have seen how regulation and a certain restricted framework for London's black cabs have produced the best result. There is competition between individual cabs and cab companies, yet the restrictive regulatory framework for qualification and control provides us with the blessing of the best taxi service of any capital city in the world that I can think of.

If the Government abandon a return to common sense and pragmatism and say, "No, no, we must continue. The Centre for Policy Studies is still alive and kicking, and we owe it to all the acolytes who did their research years ago to fulfil their views and wishes in future legislation" our own supporters as well as the general public will be profoundly disappointed. The Government now have a wonderful opportunity to say that second thoughts are legitimate in politics, and that this is a good example. I hope that my hon. Friend will reassure me and the House that that is the case.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): As always, the House will be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) for putting his views forward in such a forthright manner. The Conservative party is, of course, a broad church and if a broad church is to work it is important that we have various different strands of thinking. My hon. Friend has always been assiduous and consistent in advancing his ideas and he has done so again today. I am grateful to him, as the whole Government will be.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Centre for Policy Studies two or three times, but the Centre for Policy Studies does not run the Government. It is a think tank and we listen to its views as much as we listen to the views of our Back Benchers. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that all those various views are condensed into effective policy making. Of course, the Government have noted what he has said today about privatisation of British Rail, about deregulation in general and about London taxis. I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if, despite the fact that he raised wider transport matters today, I do not venture into that territory. He will know that as a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, I am not responsible for transport matters. In view of the seriousness with which my hon. Friend has conducted the debate today, I hope that he will be satisfied if I inform my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport of his views. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend will be able to give him a reply.

I apologise for the fact that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is not able to be here today. I hope that my hon. Friend will be satisfied with my humble presence. I shall do my best in the little time available to me to answer some of his points. As he said, his subject is wide. Normally on these occasions, it is simple for those briefing the Minister to divine what will be the subject of the debate. This is such a broad debate that I hope that my hon. Friend will not be too disappointed if I do not launch into a full-scale defence of changes in Sunday trading laws, or of the privatisation of this or that industry. I shall do my best to take up some of his points.

To return to the theme with which I opened, what unites us in the Conservative party is much greater than what divides us. All in the Conservative party are united on the great importance of our deregulation initiative which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made an absolute priority for himself. My hon. Friend alluded to that, so I hope that he will forgive me if I spend a few moments towards the end of my speech telling the House about our progress on the deregulation initiative. It is an important matter which falls within the general title of the debate.

The Government's privatisation programme, as my hon. Friend mentioned, goes back almost 14 years and stems from the strong belief that enterprise flourishes best and provides better services to customers if management is free to manage without interference from the Government in commercial matters. Privatisation is a natural partner to deregulation. Our privatisation programme has released 46 major companies and many more smaller businesses from the straitjacket of state control. Bureaucratic and political interference in commercial decisions have been cast off. Since privatisation, the companies have had the freedom to grow and to develop within the discipline of a competitive market.

The benefits of privatisation have been clearly demonstrated by improvement in the performance of individual companies, whether in productivity, profitability or better-quality products. My hon. Friend mentioned electricity prices. Domestic prices have risen slightly in real terms by 2·5 per cent. in total, but the director general is reviewing the supply price control which is due to be revised on 1 April. As Minister with responsibility for telecommunications, I am far more familiar with BT. There has been a dramatic fall in prices in telecommunications across the board. There is no doubt that privatisation has generally resulted in a much better service being available to the consumer and in a fall in prices. Above all, it has resulted in much greater investment, especially in the water companies and in telecommunications.

New regulatory regimes have been created for the utilities. New markets in utility services have been created and the monopoly element of the businesses needs special attention in the interests of customers and to provide incentives to increased efficiency. The regulators have an important role in promoting competition in the new markets and providing opportunities for new entrants to introduce new ideas and services to the benefit of customers. It has been recognised that regulation is in itself a barrier to entry in the markets. Our objective has been to

promote the minimum regulation necessary to provide proper protection for customers while enhancing the prospects of competitive development of the markets.

My hon. Friend referred to the Post Office. As he is aware, I am the Minister with responsibility for the Post Office, so I shall deal briefly with that subject. As my hon. Friend agrees, the Post Office is now doing an excellent job. The quality of the first-class service has risen from 74·5 per cent. next-day delivery in 1988-89 to 91·7 per cent. between April 1992 and January 1993. This is the 18th year of subsidy-free profit. Profitability has increased from about £86 million in 1989-90 to £247 million in 1991-92. We have the most comprehensive network of post office counters in Europe and the average queuing time is now just two minutes.

However, the Post Office is facing a period of considerable change and great challenge in the marketplace. Postal services are facing increasing competition from the telecommunications sector. Direct mail marketing, an important part of Royal Mail's volumes, is facing competition from magazine and television advertising. The Post Office must be free to respond to such changes and challenges. It was the realisation of these new opportunities and the need for the Post Office to be able to meet the challenges which prompted the Government to conduct a review of the future organisation and structure of the Post Office.

As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the review of Royal Mail and Post Office Counters last July. Let me make it clear to my hon. Friend—as he specifically raised the point today—that that should not necessarily be taken as implying that the Post Office will be privatised. It is no secret that we are looking at options to privatise Royal Mail and Post Office Counters, but we are looking at continued public sector ownership as well as private sector options. No final decisions have been taken and what my hon. Friend has said today will clearly be of great interest to us.

Although the question of the ownership of the Post Office is important, another issue that we are having to consider is the competitive environment in which the future Post Office will operate, whether it is in the private or the public sector. We accept that a degree of monopoly protection for letters is necessary to permit the continuation of a universal service with delivery to every address in the country within a uniform and affordable tariff. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that, as far as the public is concerned, that is the most important issue that we have to address. Whatever may be our views on the question of ownership, that is what the public cares about and what we must ensure. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are wholly committed to those objectives. They are not negotiable and we believe that restrictions are necessary if they are to be achieved.

Although I am always keen to examine the potential scope for deregulation—and we are, indeed, committed to permitting more competition—I do not think that, in the case of mail services, full deregulation is appropriate. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend. We looked at the matter carefully. The tenor of much of my hon. Friend's speech was that he thinks that, in certain cases, we have tried to deregulate too much. Clearly, in conducting the review, we examined the Post Office carefully. One conclusion that we reached was that full deregulation of the Post Office is impossible. The outcome for rural postal users of a free-for-all would be higher prices and poorer quality of service. I appreciate that my hon. Friend represents an urban constituency, but I suspect that if there were full deregulation of postal services, there could even be some diminution of service in suburban areas such as the area of north London that he represents.

We cannot allow the future provision of our social commitments to be an act of faith or to be provided in a haphazard fashion—but nor will we allow necessary restrictions on competition to become an abuse of monopoly power. That is why we made a commitment in the citizens charter to the creation of a postal regulator to oversee and enforce the provision of a universal service. Even here, however, we are keen to avoid over-regulation. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall not be unleashing a regulator on the multitude of private parcel carriers and delivery services. The role of the regulator will be to police the universal service and to ensure that the Post Office competes fairly where the market can sustain competition.

My hon. Friend made a point of referring to the Post Office. As the Minister responsible, I am glad that he did so. I hope that my few remarks have reassured him that we are not rushing in where angels fear to tread and that we have conducted the most careful review possible of all the options. As my hon. Friend said, we have consulted widely, and I am grateful for what he said in his usual shrewd and assiduous way.

A factor that nationalised industries, privatised industries and private sector companies have in common is that they must all operate more or less under the general regulatory regime existing today. It is a tribute to them all that they have managed so well despite the regulatory burden that has been allowed to accumulate under successive Governments. There is evidence that the rate of accumulation of regulations has been accelerating in the United Kingdom, as it has in many other advanced economies. The consequent burden stifles enterprise and distracts business from its proper task of supplying competitive goods and services.

It is important that we unite both inside the Government and outside to concentrate on the deregulation initiative, and we will do so in a considered manner. We have already drawn up a domesday book of regulations. It has been placed in the Library and my hon. Friend can consult it. The initiative announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will prove to be one of the most important and most successful aspects of this Government. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East for initiating this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 May 1993

TRANSPORT

Transpennine Strategy

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if a decision has yet been taken in respect of the link between the M65 and the A1(T) through Skipton by dual two-lane carriageway; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if his Department has received the transpennine strategy report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The transpennine study strategy report was published in September 1992. The consultation period on this document is now drawing to a close. No decisions on the options in the report will be taken until all responses to the consultation have been considered.

Rail Services

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the importance of local rail services in the north-west region to disabled people.

Mr. Freeman: I am fully aware of the importance of rail services generally to disabled people. That is why under our privatisation plans the regulator will have a duty to have regard to the interests of people with disabilities in performing his functions.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Bernard Shaw Estate

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what have been the proceeds from the Bernard Shaw estate administered by the Public Trustee since 1963;

(2) what he estimates have been the proceeds of the Bernard Shaw estate accruing to the British museum in each year since 1990.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Public Trustee does not normally disclose publicly information about the estates of private individuals. In particular, the Public Trustee is obliged by rule 29(2) of the Public Trustee Rules 1912 to observe strict secrecy in respect of every trust or estate in course of administration by him.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how many assistant directors are seconded from accountancy firms to the Serious Fraud Office; what civil service pay grade they are paid at; what pay they continue to receive from their accountancy firms; and what arrangements are in force to prevent conflicts of interest in inquiries into any business handled by the firms from which they are seconded.

The Attorney-General: Three assistant directors are seconded from accountancy firms to the Serious Fraud Office. Their firms are reimbursed at civil service grade 5 level—with an addition in respect of pension entitlement—and the pay they receive is a matter between themselves and their firms. The arrangements in force to prevent conflicts of interest are:

i. The secondees are subject to civil service provisions including the attendant duty of confidentiality.

ii On acceptance of a case, following the vetting procedure, the auditors and financial advisers to companies involved in the investigation will have been identified. The deputy director, who allocates the assistant directors and accountancy teams, will be aware of these and ensure that there is no conflict.

iii. Prior to a secondment, parent firms confirm that secondees will advise the SFO of any potential conflict of interest. Secondees have access to their firm's client lists to enable them to do so. They are also governed by professional rules relating to conflicts of interest. Such obligations continue after the period of secondment has expired.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *262*, he will set out the number of documents, and the number of pages they comprise in total, that have been sent to the Scott inquiry by his Department.

The Attorney-General: The legal secretariat to the Law Officers has submitted 240 documents, comprising 1,552 pages, to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Purchase: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the revenue lost to bona fide shopkeepers by the activities of regular and frequent organised commercial car boot sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend has made no such estimate.

Post Office Pension Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role his advisers on the Post Office review have had in offering advice on pension funds or schemes.

Mr. Leigh: The work undertaken by the Department's advisers has covered all matters relevant to the structure and ownership of the Post Office, and the prospects for greater competition in the postal market.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the present size of the surplus in the Post Office superannuation scheme.

Mr. Leigh: As recorded in the 1991-92 Post Office report and accounts, at the date of the last full actuarial valuation of the Post Office staff superannuation scheme—31 March 1991—the market value of its assets was

£7·887 billion. This was considered sufficient to cover 122·4 per cent. of the benefits which had accrued to members of POSSS and represented a surplus of approximately £1·4 billion at the time of the valuation. The last full valuation of the Post Office pension scheme was at 31 March 1989. At that date, the market value of the assets of the scheme was £47 million; this was sufficient to cover 130·8 per cent. of the benefits accrued to members and represented a surplus of approximately £11 million at the time of the valuation.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the recent practice, and what are the present intentions, of the Post Office with regard to holidays on employer contributions to the pension fund.

Mr. Leigh: The Post Office has been taking a holiday on its employer contributions to the Post Office staff superannuation scheme since April 1990. The most recent full valuation of this scheme was 31 March 1991. The Post Office has no contributions holiday in respect of the Post Office pension scheme; the last full valuation of this scheme was at 31 March 1989 and a further valuation of the scheme at 31 March 1992 is currently under way. The Post Office's contributions to its pension schemes are made in full accordance with the schemes' trust deeds and actuarial advice.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what restrictions exist on the transfer of pension fund surpluses from the Post Office superannuation scheme in the event of the privatisation of Parcelforce.

Mr. Leigh: The rules governing all aspects of transfers out of the Post Office staff superannuation scheme and the Post Office pension scheme are contained in each scheme's trust deeds.

Biotechnological Inventions

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the status of animals in relation to the proposed EC directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions.

Mr. Leigh: A revised version of the European Commission's draft directive was published in December 1992 and provides that inventions concerning living matter, including animals, shall in general be patentable. However, a number of exclusions are proposed, one of which concerns processes for genetically modifying animals. I am considering the revised draft together with the comments on it made by interested circles and expect it to be debated by an appropriate committee of the House in the near future.

In the United Kingdom, the use of animals in scientific procedures is controlled by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which complies with the relevant EC directive 86/609/EEC. It seems reasonable that inventions resulting from research carried out in conformity with the Act and directive should have the benefit of patents.

Konver Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with local authorities about the implementation of the EC Konver programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Officials of my Department are in regular contact with local authorities on the Konver initiative.

Laboratories

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the future of the National Physical Laboratory, the National Engineering Laboratory, the Warren Spring Laboratory, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist and the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

Mr. Heseltine: During the three years since becoming executive agencies, the DTI's five laboratories have made much progress towards becoming more commercial and customer-focused and more cost-conscious organisations. I am now undertaking a review, involving independent consultants, which will identify how best to build on this progress. It will complement the review of the Atomic Energy Authority which my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy announced on 1 April.

The four larger laboratories—though not the NWML—are already required to operate on a business footing, financing themselves from contracts secured at arm's length from fee-paying customers. Most of their business comes, and will continue to come, from Government Departments, including the DTI itself, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Transport, and others. They also win contracts from private sector customers.

These disciplines are bringing about a major change in the culture of these organisations, and the question on which consultants will be asked to advise is how this process can be carried further, and whether putting some or all of them into the private sector would enable them to provide a better service to their wide range of customers, in and out of Government. The consultants will also be asked to consider intermediate options, short of full privatisation, such as the franchising of facilities to private sector contractors, and the possible need for rationalisation between the five laboratories.

A number of consultancy firms have now been invited to submit proposals. The chosen firm or firms should be appointed early this month, and report later this year. I will report to the House on my conclusions.

Electricity (Large Users)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to embark on further consultations on the proposals to allow large users to bypass the electricity pool outlined in the recent White Paper, "Prospects for Coal".

Mr. Eggar: My officials are now writing to holders of electricity licences, the Director General of Electricity Supply, representatives of consumers, the electricity pool and others to seek their views on the circumstances in which consumers might contract directly with generators outside the electricity pool.

At present, the majority of customers who use electricity generated on site do not use the integrated electricity system and therefore do not pay pool charges. Additionally, if no supply licence is involved no fossil fuel levy is paid.

The Government are considering whether it would be appropriate to extend these arrangements to consumers

who pair themselves with generating sets which are not located on site. These consumers would pay charges according to the benefits or services they take from the integrated system.

The Government are also considering possible relaxation of the current supply exemption class where electricity is generated and consumed on site.

I am placing copies of the consultation documents in the Library of the House.

Package Holidays

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department has taken to publicise to tour organisers their responsibilities under the EC directive on package holidays to ensure quality services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* My Department has published guidance notes to the package travel regulations which are available free of charge. My Department has also supported the work which has been done by the Association of British Travel Agents, the Institute of Trading Standards Administration, the British Tourist Authority and others to publicise and explain the regulations.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring his Department conducts to ensure that tour operators provide adequate quality of services on overseas holidays in accordance with the EC directive on package travel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* The provisions of the package travel regulations which carry criminal penalties are enforced by local authority trading standards departments.

National Technology Acquisition Plan

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he proposes to respond, and to inform Parliament of his response, to the national strategic technology acquisition plan submitted to him by his Department's aviation committee.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* The national strategic technology acquisition plan for aeronautics contains commercially sensitive information and will not therefore be published. Officials have discussed the NSTAP with the aviation committee; these discussions will continue.

Development Aid

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the total amount of regional grants, support for industry and any other assistance given by his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* the south east, excluding Greater London, for each year from 1982-83 to 1992-93, estimated, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure, though excluding local authority credit approvals and capital allocations.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 28 April 1993]:* Regional assistance was not available in London or elsewhere in the south-east in the years 1982-83 to 1992-93. Information on support for industry and other assistance in London and the south-east is not available except at disproportionate cost. Details of the total level of DTI expenditure on regional assistance, support for industry and other assistance are published following each financial year and are available from the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sudan

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the United Nations organisation to increase its involvement in the peace process in Sudan and to encourage an investigation into human rights abuses.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We were a prime mover in securing the appointment by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva of a special rapporteur to investigate the human rights situation on a public basis throughout Sudan. We are in touch with our EC partners, the United States and others about further ways in which we might involve the United Nations on Sudan.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to make available resources to assist non-governmental organisations to attend the forthcoming first preparatory committee meeting for the fifth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to be held in New York in May.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received no requests from non-governmental organisations for assistance in attending this meeting.

Arms Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he received a copy of the proposal from the 89th Interparliamentary Union assembly in New Delhi relating to a ban on arms sales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs received on 27 April a copy of a resolution entitled "Transparency in Arms Transfers through a global Arms Register, notably as a means to check the growing use of violence to achieve political objectives". This resolution did not propose a ban on arms sales.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 21 April, *Official Report*, column *108*, what were the voting figures for each member state recorded in the meeting of the European Community's Foreign Affairs Council held on 5 April.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 20 April, *Official Report*, column *60*.

Year of the Family

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives are being planned by his Department in connection with the United Nations Year of the Family 1994.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The International Year of the Family has our full support. We see our contribution as best channelled through those voluntary organisations which we already support, including the non-governmental co-ordinating body for the year, the United Kingdom Association for the IFY 94. In conjunction with our EC partners we are also working on plans for a European conference on the future of the family.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of the application to the people of Gibraltar of the principle of self-determination and of the provisions of the treaty of Utrecht; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) on 6 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *189*.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances the Government would recognise the acquisition of land by force by the Bosnian Serbs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The London conference made it clear in its statement of principles that we would not recognise advantages gained by force or fait accompli in the former Yugoslavia. We remain convinced that only a negotiated settlement by all parties will produce genuine and lasting peace.

EDUCATION

University Funding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the Higher Education Funding Council intends to publish the average units of council funding which formed the basis of the university funding allocations for 1993-94.

Mr. Boswell: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is aiming to publish this information shortly.

Technology Schools Initiative

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he intends to take to promote the technology schools initiative in future years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Two hundred and twenty-two maintained secondary schools have been awarded capital allocations as a result of competitive bids in the 1992-93 and 1993-94 rounds of the technology schools initiative. The Department is taking steps to promote an active network of TSI schools, with a view to enabling them to share their experience in the teaching of technology and to feeding the benefits of the initiative into other secondary schools. The Government intend to maintain their support for TSI schools. Decisions on whether to invite further bids for 1994-95 or later years have yet to be taken.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Agencies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the names, the salaries of the chief executives and the total wage bill for each next steps agency created since 1979;

(2) what is the total wages bill for next steps agencies in the period 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: The names of agencies and their chief executives are published in the "Next Steps Briefing Note, 1 April 1993", available from the Cabinet Office. Information about agency wage bills and the salaries of chief executives for 1991-92 is available from the published accounts of the agencies concerned; copies are available in the House of Commons Library. For 1991-92 the total full-year wage bill of agencies in operation for all or part of that year is estimated at about £3·2 billion. The information requested is not yet available for 1992-93.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision has been made for allocations of additional funding to Departments for redundancy costs under the market testing programme.

Mr. Portillo: There is no central provision specifically for redundancy costs. Within the limits set for spending on running costs, including redundancy costs, it is for Departments to decide how to allocate their administrative budget to meet their departmental priorities and objectives. Should they be unable to absorb the costs, the Treasury is prepared to look sympathetically at the scope for easing the burden of up-front redundancy costs within the limits of what can be afforded.

Duty-free Alcohol

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average excise and VAT saving for an individual who buys in France his or her full indicative level of the following: 10 litres of mid-priced spirits, 20 litres of mid-priced fortified wine, 30 litres of mid-priced table wine and 60 litres of mid-priced sparkling wine.

Sir John Cope: Based on current exchange rates, an individual could save around £200 on excise duty. A further £34 would be saved from the consequential VAT applied to the excise duty. These figures are independent of the price of the goods.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions have been carried out against British companies importing goods from the former Yugoslavia since 31 May 1992.

Sir John Cope: There have been no prosecutions.

T. and G. Woodware, Bristol

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action Her Majesty's Government intend to take against the British company T. and G. Woodware of Bristol.

Sir John Cope: Customs tells me that it has no reason to take any action.

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 22 March regarding a constituent.

Mr. Dorrell: I wrote to the hon. Member on 4 May.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will request the governors of the European bank for reconstruction and development to make a statement on the bank's expenditure on administrative overheads; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will take action to ensure that the European bank for reconstruction and development reduces its expenditure on administrative overheads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 20 April 1993]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear in his statement to the European bank for reconstruction and development's annual meeting, on 27 April, the European bank for reconstruction and development's duty to use the taxpayer's resources as cost effectively as possible. The Government have always sought to secure the best possible value for money from all the international financial institutions.

Her Majesty's Government welcome the measures agreed by the bank's board of directors and recently announced by President Attali to strengthen budgetary procedures at the European bank for reconstruction and development.

Many governors made statements at the European bank for reconstruction and development's annual meeting on 26 and 27 April on the need for the European bank for reconstruction and development to make the most cost-effective use of the resources entrusted to it.

NHS Borrowing

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *180*, if he will make a statement on the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement of *(a)* the decision to relax the rules governing national health service borrowing, *(b)* leasing arrangements and *(c)* the use of private sector services by the national health service.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The rules governing the measurement of the PSBR are unchanged. When the national health service leases from the private sector, the annual lease payments are a determinant of the PSBR. Payments by the public sector, including the national health service, to the private sector for services provided also continue to be a determinant of the PSBR. Any borrowing undertaken by the private sector to finance its own spending would not count against the PSBR.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reduce the qualifying period for attendance allowance to three months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Benefits (Payment Delays)

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances compensation will be paid in recognition of delays in payments of benefits.

Mr. Lilley: Redress for the citizen when things go wrong is at the heart of the citizens charter. I am therefore pleased to announce a significant improvement to my Department's arrangements for compensation payments when benefit claims have been excessively delayed. The new arrangements will take effect for all new claims paid from 1 April 1993.

Until now, compensation was only considered when the delay in payment of benefit in new claims was at least 12 months. I am now proposing to reduce this period. In future, compensation will be considered where a new claim is delayed for six months beyond the target set for clearing the bulk of claims—usually between 85 per cent. and 95 per cent. This will meet points which I know have been of increasing concern to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in cases which he has been investigating.

The effect will be to bring forward the date from which compensation may be paid and to link this date explicitly with the performance targets set for the Benefits Agency. In the case of income support, for example, where the relevant target in the BA business plan is to clear 90 per cent. of claims in 13 working days, compensation would be considered after around seven months from the date of entitlement, compared with 12 months today. No change will be made in respect of war pensions or industrial disability benefits, where the effect of the new formula would be to extend the current 12-month period.

The other criteria against which compensation is considered will remain the same: namely that the delay must be caused by official error and the arrears of benefit due must be £50 or more.

I recognise, however, that the improvement I am announcing today will be too late for those people who claimed disability living allowance last year and suffered unacceptable delays before receiving payment of the benefit. In view of the exceptional problems following the introduction of DLA a special compensatory payment will be made to those people who:

(i) made a new claim for DLA, attendance allowance or mobility allowance on or after 3 February 1992;
(ii) were paid benefit before 1 April 1993; and
(iii) suffered a delay in the payment of benefit of more than eight months.

The payment to this particular group of people will be at the rate of £10 per month for each month in excess of the eight-month period. The Benefits Agency is making the necessary arrangements to ensure that the payments are made as soon as possible. The agency will assess the amounts of compensation without the need for claims for compensation from customers. The task should be completed in the autumn.

Well Person Clinics

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost to the Exchequer to date of payment by the Benefits Agency for all staff aged 35 years and over to attend private well person clinics; and how many such staff have to date attended.

Mr. Burt: The Benefits Agency has corporate responsibility for the management and funding of the health screening programme for staff aged 35 years or over.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the number of staff examined cannot be given. Up to 31 March 1993, the total cost to the Exchequer was £2·1 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Buses

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will commission a study of experience of bus tendering in London, deregulation elsewhere in England and Great Britain and of regulation in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: The Transport Select Committee is currently considering these issues in the context of its inquiry into bus deregulation in London and is taking evidence from a number of sources, including the Government.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy for taking senior British business representatives with him on official overseas visits.

The Prime Minister: I am firmly committed to taking senior business representatives with me whenever possible when I visit key markets overseas. My recent visits with a business group to India and Saudi Arabia were examples. I intend to build on them. I hope to visit Japan in the Autumn with senior business representatives.

My ministerial colleagues also take every opportunity to promote Britain and British goods abroad. They are planning to lead at least 14 missions to 17 countries, to markets as diverse as Ghana, Singapore and Kazakstan this year.

Prerogative Powers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the groups of actions taken using prerogative powers for which it would incur disproportionately high costs for them to be recorded individually.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to record the occasions on which prerogative powers are used where disproportionate costs would not be involved.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what prerogative powers have been attenuated by being bought within statute law since 1979.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 1 March at column *19*, and to the response of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Home Department's response to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) on 21 April at column 492. The relationship between statutory and prerogative powers can be very complex. This complexity would mean examination of each section of each Act passed since 1979 in order to determine whether a prerogative power had been brought within statute law. This would be impracticable and would lead to disproportionate cost.

Treaty on European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration was given at the European Council held at Edinburgh in December 1992 to the termination of membership of any member state of the European Community in the event of non-ratification of the treaty on European union.

The Prime Minister: The issue was not considered at the Edinburgh European Council.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Kent Marshes

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what studies have been carried out into water availability in the north Kent marshes for site of special scientific interest management and environmentally sensitive area implementation;

(2) what criteria he will employ to decide the priority for water level management on SSSI in north Kent and the creation of new wetland areas under the recently announced environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Curry: During the preparation of the north Kent marshes environmentally sensitive area (ESA) extensive consultations were carried out on all aspects of the scheme, including the availability and management of water. English Nature was one of the organisations consulted both in respect of the ESA as a whole and the sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within it. The Ministry will continue to work closely with English Nature to achieve our shared environmental objectives throughout the area.

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial resources are available to install new drainage structures which will permit raising of ditch water levels in the north Kent marshes environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Curry: Eighty per cent. grants for the construction of bunds or sluices or other works to control water levels are available to farmers who have land under an environmentally sensitive area agreement. Where schemes are undertaken by drainage bodies grant aid may also be available under the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Land Drainage Act 1991.

Meat Products

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the average increases in the retail price of bacon, sausage and other meat-based food products sold in the United Kingdom year on year over the past five years.

Mr. Curry: The annual percentage increases over the last five years in retail prices, as measured by the retail prices index, are given:

Year (change on previous year)	*Bacon*	*Other meat products (including sausages)*
1988	+3·3	−0·6
1989	+9·3	+6·0
1990	+12·2	+11·3
1991	+1·4	+3·9
1992	+6·8	+0·5

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of bacon, sausage and other meat-based food products *(a)* exported from and *(b)* imported into the United Kingdom year on year for the past five years.

Mr. Curry: The figures for trade in all meat preparations—which includes bacon and sausage—during the last five years are as follows:

	Exports		*Imports*	
	Weight (MT.)	*Value (£m)*	*Weight (MT.)*	*Value (£m)*
1988	16,817	33·121	488,924	791·763
1989	18,006	37·868	492,847	936·193
1990	18,449	42·357	481,505	981·358
1991	23,398	54·737	488,013	989·969
1992	27,176	66·792	495,577	1,026·292

Source: Central Statistical Office MA 20 and MM20.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many companies are involved with the manufacture of bacon, sausage and other meat-based foods in the United Kingdom in total; and how many of those are based in *(a)* other EC countries and *(b)* non-EC countries.

Mr. Curry: Information is not available on the number of companies engaged in these activities or on their distribution according to the domicile of the controlling interest. However, at the end of 1992 there was 637 establishments in the United Kingdom classified as having a principal activity of bacon curing or the manufacture of meat products—heading 4122 of the standard industrial classification, revised 1980.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume of meat foods was manufactured in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Curry: Comprehensive information on the volume of meat foods manufactured in the United Kingdom is not available. However, the value of sales of meat products by all establishments engaged in their manufacture is available and is shown below:

£ million

Year	*Volume*
1988	2,464
1989	2,545
1990	2,723
1991	2,832
1992	3,040

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the change in the level of consumption of manufactured meat foods in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Curry: Information on the level of household consumption of manufactured meat foods—which includes bacon and ham, sausages, pies, canned or cooked meats and other meat products—is available from the national food survey.

Year	*Household consumption in ounces per person per week*
1988	15·97
1989	15·86
1990	15·03
1991	15·03
1992	15·41

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people were employed in meat foods manufacturing in each year since 1988.

Mr. Curry: Information is not available for each of the years requested. Figures from the three most recent censuses of employment are shown:

Year to September	*Great Britain ('000)*
1987	50·9
1989	48·7
1991	52·1

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume of manufactured meat foods was sold in the retail market in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Curry: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Consumers' household expenditure on manufactured meat foods—which includes bacon and ham, sausages, pies, canned or cooked meats and other meat products—at constant 1985 prices for the years in question is shown:

	£ million
1988	3,555
1989	3,730
1990	3,593
1991	3,509
1992	3,651

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provisions are in place to ensure fair competition in manufacturing and retailing of meat-based foods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy is to promote competition throughout the economy. If the hon. Member has evidence of anti-competitive practices in the manufacturing and retailing of meat-based products, he should write to the Director General of Fair Trading who has responsibility, under the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the Competition Act 1980, for investigating allegations of anti-competitive practices.

Cereal Output

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of EC cereal output in each year since 1990.

Mr. Curry: Based on European Commission statistical information, the level of EC cereal output in each year since 1990 in tonnes is as follows:

	Tonnes
1990	170,108,200
1991	181,034,800
1992	[1]167,902,800

[1] Provisional.

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the change in cereal output in the latest available year from the previous year in each EC country.

Mr. Curry: Based on European Commission statistical information, the table sets out the change in cereal output from 1990 to 1991 for each EC country

Country	*Output (Tonnes)*		*Change (Tonnes)*
	1990	*1991*	
Belgium	1,996,100	1,979,300	−16,800
Denmark	9,606,000	9,169,000	−437,000
Germany	37,580,000	39,289,000	+1,709,000
Greece	4,042,000	5,607,400	+1,565,400
France	55,118,000	60,232,000	+5,114,000
Ireland	1,970,000	2,093,000	+123,000
Italy	16,286,000	18,202,000	+1,916,000
Luxembourg	125,800	137,600	+11,800
Netherlands	1,388,300	1,296,000	−92,300
United Kingdom	22,566,000	22,635,000	+69,000
Portugal	1,200,000	1,543,300	+343,300
Spain	18,230,000	18,851,200	+621,200

Peat-free Composts

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what incentives are available to the horticulture industry to use peat-free composts.

Mr. Curry: The incentive to use peat-free compost flows from the demands of the market.

Set-aside Land

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the operation of rotational set-aside in United Kingdom relative to other EC countries *(a)* in general and *(b)* in respect of reducing the threshold tonnage for cereal production; what is the Government's policy with regard to reducing the number of exempted farms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We have received a number of representations about various aspects of the set-aside arrangements under the arable area payments scheme. We have always argued that the threshold for the simplified scheme for small producers, which has no set-aside requirement, should be set at the lowest figure consistent with the need for a de minimis treatment of the very smallest producers.

Gangmasters

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the activities of gangmasters in the farming industry.

Mr. Curry: Gangmasters play a role in the recruitment of casual agricultural labour at certain times of the year. Like other employers of agricultural labour, they are subject to monitoring by the Ministry to ensure compliance with agricultural wages orders.

Cormorants

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cormorants were killed under licence to prevent serious damage to fisheries in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Soames: No cormorants have been killed under licence in Wales in the last 10 years. Details for England are as follows:

	Number
1983	12
1984	13
1985	14
1986	14
1987	19
1988	12
1989	11
1990	11
1991	18
1992	13
Total	137

Fisheries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will initiate discussions with other EC fishing nations and the European Commission to ensure a reduction in the European fishing effort in British waters pari passu with that enforced by the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992.

Mr. Curry: Working group discussions on the implementation of the 1993-96 multi-annual guidance programmes are already taking place in Brussels. I assured the House last July that we would not reduce days at sea here unless we are satisfied that other member states are taking effective steps to meet their targets.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will suspend the implementation of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992.

Mr. Curry: No.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure the effective application of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1991.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

A statutory code of practice issued under section 40 of the Food Safety Act gives guidance to food authorities on the enforcement of the temperature control requirements contained in the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 and 1991. This code sets out a staged approach to enforcement, with particular emphasis on educating and advising proprietors of food businesses. The Government have also published guidelines for enforcement authorities and the catering industry giving advice on the requirements of the regulations. In addition, officials have held meetings with representatives of the food industry to discuss the application of the regulations.

Farm Shops

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent farmers are permitted or encouraged to maximise the range of goods sold in their farm shops, including the buying in from wholesalers of other food and related products.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 April, *Official Report*, column *320*. It will be for the local planning authority to take into account the advice in planning policy guidance note 7, together with all other material planning considerations, in reaching planning decisions on farm shops in the countryside.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *242*, whether the United Nations has agreed to reimburse all the costs of British Forces in Bosnia, including the national support element; what will be the basis of calculation for charging the costs; whether British forces in Bosnia will be obliged to seek United Nations sanction for replacement items of equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Nations will reimburse costs for all British forces in Bosnia in accordance with established rules, in so far as contributions from member states allow. Our charges are calculated on an extra cost basis. From 1 April, the United Nations assumed responsibility for deciding operational requirements. Payments for any equipment replaced by the British forces will be made only with the prior agreement of the United Nations.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are given to commanding officers in Bosnia with regard to contacts with the press.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Written guidelines are given to commanding officers in Bosnia. These guidelines are structured to help commanding officers, most of whom have no experience of the media or press, on how best to deal with press inquiries. These guidelines supplement those issued by the United Nations, which has overall responsibility for relations between the United Nations protection force in the former Yugoslavia and the media.

Laser-guided Bombs

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he intends to meet the RAF's future requirements for laser-guided bombs.

Mr. Aitken: The 1992 Statement on the Defence Estimates—paragraph 421—noted the remarkable results achieved in Operation Granby by precision-guided munitions and that we were reviewing the mix of precision and non-precision munitions in the RAF's inventory. I am pleased to announce that my Department is today inviting tenders for the supply of new advanced low-level laser-guided bombs. These bombs will, in part, replace our existing Paveway II laser-guided bombs; they will be more flexible and accurate, and effective against a wider range of possible targets.

This competititive procurement is part of our programme to ensure that our armed forces continue to be provided with up-to-date and highly capable equipment.

Employment Costs

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the average daily costs attributable to the employment of *(a)* a lance corporal and *(b)* a trooper.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The average daily cost of a lance corporal is £107·30 and a trooper is £91·29.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the reciprocated withdrawal of all sub-strategic nuclear weapons from the arsenals of NATO and Russia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The alliance's strategic concept published in November 1991 makes clear that NATO continues to require sub-strategic nuclear forces, albeit at a significantly reduced level, as an essential link between conventional and strategic nuclear forces.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the planned Trident deployment is capable of accommodating both the United Kingdom's entire sub-strategic and strategic nuclear force requirements;

(2) if United Kingdom Trident submarines are capable of deploying missiles that are assigned a sub-strategic role alongside missiles that are assigned a strategic role, within the same submarine;

(3) what is his Department's policy towards the development of a stand-off capability for the United Kingdom's air-launched sub-strategic nuclear weapons;

(4) what assessment his Department has made as to the cost savings that would result from the deployment of the United Kingdom's sub-strategic nuclear capability within the Trident force deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are continuing to study a range of possible options for our long-term sub-strategic nuclear capability, including the possible use of Trident in this role. An announcement will be made at the appropriate time.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment of the implications of the collapse of the Warsaw treaty organisation for the operational effectiveness of the United Kingdom's air-launched sub-strategic nuclear force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's force of dual-capable aircraft remains fully capable of carrying out its sub-strategic nuclear role.

Nuclear Free-fall Bombs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the military rationale for the continued deployment of free-fall nuclear bombs by the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have a continuing need for a sub-strategic nuclear capability, as an essential link between conventional and strategic nuclear forces.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the means by which his Department will demonstrate to other countries that the recent reduction in the number of nuclear free-fall bombs deployed by the United Kingdom has been implemented.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In keeping with the practice of successive Governments, we do not make public detailed information on our nuclear stockpile size. The reduction of our free-fall bomb holdings by over a half is currently being implemented. The question of verification does not arise.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements have been implemented to extend the operational life of the WE177 nuclear bomb beyond the 1990s.

Mr. Aitken: It is not in the interest of national security to discuss details of the configuration of nuclear weapons. However, the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb is expected to remain serviceable well into the first decade of the next century.

Polaris Submarines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the information regarding the number of missiles and warheads deployed on the Polaris submarines when they first entered service was released into the public domain.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information was first provided in defence open government document 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives, Modernising the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force".

Married Quarters, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the sale of surplus married quarters at Mantle gardens, Barne Barton, Plymouth, to Devon and Cornwall housing association to be completed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Devon and Cornwall housing association has requested that completion of the deal should be delayed. The properties are now being seriously damaged by vandals, however, and in order to protect the interests of the taxpayer and to ensure the early reuse of the dwellings, arrangements are now in hand to sell the estate on the open market.

Adriatic (Port Monitoring)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the information available to him on the actions taken by NATO or the WEU monitoring forces in the Adriatic in relation to the passage to Montenegrin ports of each of the motor vessels Dimitrakis, Novotsak II and East River, showing the dates on which each was identified, challenged or boarded, and the purported port of destination.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have been asked to reply.

MV Dimitrakis was boarded by a NATO monitoring vessel on 18 January 1993. It gave its port of destination as Koper—Slovenia—and was allowed to proceed. It then diverted to the Montenegrin port of Bar; on emerging, it was intercepted and towed to Brindisi for inspection.

MV Novotsak II was boarded by a Western European Union vessel on 23 January 1993. Having declared Venice

as its port of destination, it was allowed to proceed. It then diverted to Bar, where it remains. We have asked the Russian authorities to take up the matter with the vessel's owners.

MV East River was intercepted, while stationary in international waters, by a NATO vessel on 11 March. It declared its port of destination as Venice. It claimed to have engine, gyro and radar problems; an offer of assistance was declined. Some hours later it was seen heading for Bar; NATO vessels were unable to prevent it reaching Montenegrin territorial waters. The Liberian authorities have suspended the ship's licences. We have asked the Greek authorities to pursue the matter with the ship's owners.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education Grants

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons are receiving grants from each of the five area education boards to attend tertiary education institutions in Great Britain;

(2) how many persons are receiving grants from each of the five area education boards to attend tertiary education institutions in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The number of awards made by each of the education and library boards, in the current academic year, in respect of attendance at tertiary education institutions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland is as follows:

Board	*Great Britain Number*	*Republic of Ireland Number*
Belfast	1,369	130
South Eastern	3,176	134
Western	2,097	221
North Eastern	2,646	72
Southern	1,923	235

Energy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will establish a scheme for assisting pilot energy projects in Northern Ireland along the same lines as that operating in Great Britain.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 29 April, *Official Report*, column *474*.

Road Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *270*, what conclusions there were of the economic assessments for each of the 11 major road schemes referred to in that answer.

Mr. Atkins: As stated previously, the assessments showed that each scheme represented good value for money.

Students

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the sums paid for *(a)* students of the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* other EC countries studying at tertiary level in Northern Ireland for the past four years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* Information on the breakdown between students from the Republic of Ireland and other EC countries is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost: £876,765 was paid in fees for students from EC countries in 1989-90; £2,616,822 in 1990-91; and £3,830,969 in 1991-92. The provisional figure for 1992-93 is £4,598,250.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of third-level student places required in Northern Ireland in 1995 up to the year 2000.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* It is estimated that the full-time equivalent places required for students on full-time and part-time higher education—undergraduate level—courses will be as follows:

	Number
1995-96	25,300
1996-97	25,900
1997-98	27,000
1998-99	28,300
1999-2000	29,800
2000-01	31,200

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he plans in the provision of funds for universities and colleges of education over the next three financial years.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* None. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland will continue to provide the funding for universities and colleges of education in Northern Ireland.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* chairmen and *(b)* board members of training and enterprise councils come from small firms.

Mr. McLoughlin: Records held centrally show that six training and enterprise council (TEC) chairmen and 127 TEC board members are from companies with 50 or fewer employees.

Employment Training

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras of 22 April on the cost per trainee of employment training.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 29 April 1993, *Official Report*, columns *499-500*.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *843*, what assessment she has made of the reason for the census in April 1981 recording fewer people unemployed and seeking work that the equivalent figure for the same date produced by her Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department's definition of an unemployed person quite reasonably includes the criterion that he or she must be "actively" seeking work. The census of population does not include this criterion, which is why its figures are higher. This was the case in 1981 as well as in 1991.

Private Finance Initiative

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps her Department has taken to implement the private finance initiative announced in the autumn statement on 12 November 1992 and in the Treasury private finance guidance published on 9 December 1992.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The potential scope of the initiative will vary between Departments. This Department is examining the scope for involving the private sector in the ways suggested by the Treasury's interim guidance.

WALES

Trawsfynydd

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what volumes of *(a)* radioactive waste and *(b)* spent nuclear fuel are currently stored at the Trawsfynydd nuclear plant; what amounts of (i) radioactive waste and (ii) spent nuclear fuel have been transported from the plant for disposal or processing, respectively; and what visits have been made to the plant by Euratom safeguards inspectors since it opened.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The volumes of radioactive waste and spent fuel stored at and transported from Trawsfynydd are operational matters for Nuclear Electric. The precise number of inspections carried out at Trawsfynydd is a matter for the EC Euratom safeguards directorate and the operator. I understand, however, that the objectives of Euratom require that this type of plant should be inspected about three or four times each year.

Nursing Clinical Grades

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what date he expects all nursing clinical grading appeals to have been decided.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I expect appeals at the local level to be completed soon. As more appeals continue to come through to the Welsh and national—negotiating council —levels, I cannot forecast when all such appeals will be completed. A number of procedural changes aimed at significantly speeding up the appeals process are being discussed within the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council.

Child Protection Registers

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information is available to his Department on the numbers of children included on child protection registers; and if he will indicate the level of disaggregation of the available data.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of children recorded on local authority child protection registers is published annually, showing numbers on the registers, additions and removals by category of abuse, age and sex.

A copy of the child protection register statistics for Wales in 1991 can be found in the Library of the House.

Rented Accommodation

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken to help Welsh local authorities improve the quality and quantity of privately rented accommodation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: More than £16·5 million has been made available to local authorities in Wales over the last three years to support schemes to improve the quality and quantity of privately rented accommodation. These schemes involve improvements in the condition and management of rented homes, including houses in multiple occupation, and increases in the supply of homes through the conversion of under-utilised accommodation providing flats above shops, for example.

Inward Investment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will break down into the category of jobs *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded, the total jobs he referred to as arising from inward investment in 1992-93 in his speech to the Council of Welsh Districts on economic development on Wednesday 21 April in Rhyl; and what information he can provide on the county-by-county location of such promised jobs also broken down by (i) created and (ii) safeguarded;

(2) if he will provide a county-by-county breakdown of the forecast expenditure figure of £949 million, referred to as arising from inward investment in 1992-93 in his speech to the Council of Welsh Districts on economic development on Wednesday 21 April in Rhyl.

Mr. David Hunt: The county-by-county breakdown of inward investment recorded for Wales during 1992-93 is as shown in the following schedule. The figures are based on information provided by companies at the time the projects were recorded and have not been amended to take account of subsequent developments.

County	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Jobs	Capital Expenditure
				(£ million)
Clwyd	1,579	835	2,414	332
Dyfed	132	875	1,007	106
Gwent	1,396	2,080	3,476	134
Gwynedd	618	391	1,009	26
Powys	653	95	748	7
Mid Glamorgan	1,206	1,672	2,878	126
South Glamorgan	785	959	1,744	181
West Glamorgan	258	324	582	37
Totals	6,627	7,231	13,858	949

Moles (Strychnine)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of permits issued by his Department's officials authorising the use of strychnine for mole control and the overall amount of strychnine used for mole control for each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Permits	Amount (gms)
1988	2,421	12,084
1989	2,239	11,289
1990	1,607	8,575
1991	1,489	6,789
1992	1,550	8,421

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what procedures are followed to ensure that the equal opportunities policies of the civil service are maintained if a function or service is contracted out as part of the market testing programme.

Mr. Waldegrave: If, following a market testing exercise, a function or service is contracted out but the individuals carrying it out remain civil servants they will continue to be covered by civil service equal opportunities policies.

Where services are contracted out to private companies, the Government do not intend to require particular employment policies and practices and such requirements will not be included in tender documents. EC directives impose restrictions on the Government's ability to take account of non-commercial matters. Subject to these restrictions, Departments and agencies may wish to give prospective contractors the opportunity to provide information on their employment policies and practices, including equal opportunities, that such contractors may believe is relevant to their ability to fulfil the contract for which they are bidding.

Charterline

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the contract for the Charterline was awarded as a result of a competitive tendering exercise.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Fourth Framework Document

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his response to the Commission's second working document on the fourth framework presented by Professor Ruberti.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The United Kingdom is in the process of preparing a response to the Commission's second working document on the EC's fourth framework programme for research and development, which will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Astronomy

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what public funds have been devoted to the support of astronomy in each of the past 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Waldegrave: Expenditure on astronomy by the Science and Engineering Research Council, including on related areas such as solar terrestrial physics and planetary science, has been as follows:

	£ million
1983-84	40·8
1984-85	46·3
1985-86	48·4
1986-87	47·0
1987-88	50·9
1988-89	60·0
1989-90	66·1
1990-91	62·6
1991-92	66·8
1992-93	72·7

Resources spent by universities on astronomy from funds provided by the higher education funding councils are not separately identifiable.

SCOTLAND

Paintball

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in the sport of paintball in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Relevant information is not held centrally to enable such an estimate to be made.

Homelessness

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are his plans for dealing with homelessness among 16 to 21-year-olds;

(2) if he will establish an inquiry into homelessness among young people.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities have the statutory responsibility for dealing with homelessness. Almost £23 million in extra capital allocations have been made available to local authorities over the financial years 1991-93 to help the homeless. The first £15 million was aimed specifically at young, single homeless people. In addition, £150,000 has been made available over three years under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 for the development of projects to support young, single homeless people in Scottish cities who are roofless or at risk of becoming so and to reduce the risk of them moving to London.

We commissioned, and published in February, the report of the Glasgow university study, "Homeless and Young People in Scotland", and are consulting widely on its recommendations. Our current review of the code of guidance on homelessness will include interviews with homeless applicants, including young people; and the parallel survey of housing authorities' policy and procedures will also cover young people.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many 16 to 21-year-olds last year were turned away from temporary accommodation projects; and what is his latest estimate of the number of 16 to 21-year-olds sleeping rough;

(2) how many 16 to 21-year-olds have declared themselves homeless to local authorities and voluntary organisations in each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on those turned away from temporary accommodation is not collected centrally. The available information on the numbers sleeping rough is due to be published later this month in the 1991 census report for Scotland, part 1.

The available information on households applying to local authorities is published in the statistical bulletins "Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland 1979-80 to 1990-91" (HSG/1992/1) and "Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland 1980-81 to 1991-92" (HSG/1992/6), both of which are available in the House Library. No information is collected from voluntary agencies on this matter.

University of Edinburgh Dental School

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many redundancies are to take place in 1993 and 1994 at the University of Edinburgh dental school.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions relating to personnel requirements, including redundancies, are a matter for the University of Edinburgh as employer of the staff concerned.

Departmental Crofts

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those parts of his Department's crofting estate, other than house sites, which have been sold by his Department in each of the past five years, with acreages and purchases in each case.

Sir Hector Monro: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Summary—number of sales from crofting estates 1988-1992

Year	Sales to Sitting Tenants		Sales to Third Parties	
	Number	Hectarage	Number	Hectarage
1988	10	549·47	22	92·41
1989	26	121·44	17	8·42
1990	24	62·37	18	6·13
1991	21	745·95	16	252·42
1992	22	75·98	14	1,008·86
	103	1,555·18	87	1,368·24

1988

Area/estate	Sitting tenants		Third parties		
	Number	Hectarage	Number	Hectarage	Use[1]
Argyll					
Ardachy	1	479·27	1	14·73	B
Calgary	—	—	1	27·70	B
Sunart	1	0·10	—	—	
Inverness (Mainland)					
Tomich	—	—	1	0·08	E
Caithness					
West Watten	1	29·98	—	—	
Whiteinch	—	—	1	0·10	A
Sutherland					
Armadale	—	—	1	0·14	A
Skye and Raasay					
Kilmuir	2	11·93	1	0·05	E
	—	—	1	0·01	B
	—	—	1	11·48	B
	—	—	1	0·49	A
	—	—	1	0·08	C
Bracadale	1	0·17	1	0·97	E
Scorrybreck	1	0·11	1	0·25	B
	—	—	1	0·18	A

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
Rassay	—	—	1	0·03	A
	—	—	1	0·01	A
	—	—	1	0·04	B
Western Isles					
Borve, Harris	—	—	1	12·73	G
Benbecula	—	—	1	22·96	G
	—	—	1	0·09	A
Eolingarry, Barra	—	—	1	0·06	A
Vatersay	—	—	1	0·10	A
Newton, North Uist	—	—	1	0·13	A
Northern Isles					
Stove, Orkney	3	27·91	—	—	
TOTAL	10	549·47	22	92·41	

Keynote use:
[1] A = Residential.
B = Local authority—Recreation/residential.
C = Local authority—Roads/water.
D = Forestry Commission—Forestry.
E = Commercial—Private sector.
F = Government Department.
G = Private—Agricultural.

1989

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
Argyll					
Kinlochlaich	1	0·26	—	—	—
Ardachy	—	—	1	0·08	A
Inverness (Mainland)					
Inshes	1	0·89	—	—	—
Woodside of Culloden	1	25·58	1	0·42	A
Tomich	—	—	1	5·62	E
Ross and Cromarty					
Broomhill	1	30·91	—	—	—
Balnabeen	—	—	1	0·17	A
			1	0·07	A
Caithness					
Dunn and Scarmclate	1	35·80	—	—	—
Sutherland					
Armadale	—	—	1	0·28	C
			1	0·04	C
Borgie	—	—	1	0·19	A
Skye and Raasay					
Kilmuir	7	4·04	1	0·18	C
			1	0·35	F
			1	0·20	A
			1	0·18	A
Bracadale	4	1·93	1	0·10	C
			1	0·08	A
Kingsburgh	1	0·07	1	0·30	A
Claigan	1	0·08	—	—	—
Scorrybreck	1	0·23	—	—	—
Raasay	1	8·59	—	—	—
Western Isles					
Scaristavore, Harris	1	0·36	—	—	—
Luskentyre, Harris	1	0·07	—	—	—
Borve, Harris	1	0·09	—	—	—
Balranald, North Uist	—	—	1	0·06	A
Newton, North Uist			1	0·10	A
Benbecula	3	12·54	—	—	—
TOTAL	26	121·44	17	8·42	

Keynote use:
[1] A = Residential.
B = Local authority—Recreation/residential.

C = Local authority—Roads/water.
D = Forestry Commission—Forestry.
E = Commercial—Private sector.
F = Government Department.
G = Private—Agricultural.

1990

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
Argyll					
Sunart	1	2·96	1	1·55	E
	—	—	1	0·01	B
Craignure	—	—	1	1·84	A
Islay	—	—	1	0·18	B
Inverness (Mainland)					
Milton of Culloden	1	4·02	—	—	—
Tomaig	1	0·05	—	—	—
Tomich	—	—	1	0·60	E
	—	—	1	0·12	A
Ross and Cromarty					
Kinbeachie	1	21·19	—	—	—
Sutherland					
Armadale	4	22·96	—	—	—
Skye and Raasay					
Bracadale	4	6·99	1	0·01	C
	—	—	1	0·09	A
Kilmuir	7	2·21	1	0·11	A
	—	—	1	0·04	B
	—	—	1	0·25	E
Kingsburgh	1	0·17	1	0·19	A
Scorrybreck	2	1·39	—	—	—
Raasay	—	—	1	0·13	G
Western Isles					
Newton, North Uist	1	0·33	1	0·11	A
Benbecula	1	0·10	1	0·01	C
	—	—	1	0·27	C
	—	—	1	0·23	C
Northern Isles					
Stove, Orkney	—	—	1	0·39	C
TOTAL	24	62·37	18	6·13	

Keynote use:
[1] A = Residential.
B = Local authority—Recreation/residential.
C = Local authority—Roads/water.
D = Forestry Commission—Forestry.
E = Commercial—Private sector.
F = Government Department.
G = Private—Agricultural.

1991

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
Argyll					
Sunart	1	30·70	—	—	
White Hart Parks	1	1·57	—	—	
Inverness (Mainland)					
Tomich	1	1·64	—	—	
Ross and Cromarty					
Balnabeen	1	17·04	—	—	
Raddery	—	—	1	6·55	G
Caithness					
Forss	1	71·18	1	0·40	C
Skye and Raasay					
Raasay	1	0·07	1	0·02	B

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
	—	—	1	2·58	G
	—	—	1	0·55	E
Bracadale	3	560·81	—	—	
	—	—	1	0·78	E
	—	—	1	0·21	A
	—	—	1	0·06	B
Claigan	—	—	1	44·83	D
	—	—	1	186·46	D
Kingsburgh	1	5·17	—	—	
Kilmuir	5	0·63	1	4·74	C
	—	—	1	0·01	A
	—	—	1	0·09	A
Western Isles					
Barra	1	0·13	1	0·07	A
	1	0·05	—	—	
	1	0·07	—	—	
Benbecula	—	—	1	0·07	A
Luskentyre, Harris	1	0·04	—	—	
Northern Isles					
Stove, Orkney	2	56·82	1	5·00	C
TOTAL	21	745·92	16	252·42	

Keynote use:
[1] A = Residential.
B = Local authority—Recreation/residential.
C = Local authority—Roads/water.
D = Forestry Commission—Forestry.
E = Commercial—Private sector.
F = Government Department.
G = Private—Agricultural.

1992

Area/estate	Sitting tenants Number	Sitting tenants Hectarage	Third parties Number	Third parties Hectarage	Use[1]
Argyll					
Sunart	3	4·34	—	—	
Inverness (Mainland)					
Tomich	1	0·76	—	—	
Inshes	—	—	2	0·30	E
Ross and Cromarty					
Raddery	1	6·96	—	—	
Caithness					
Dunn and Scarmclate	1	46·70	—	—	
Sutherland					
Armadale	1	5·42	—	—	
Skye and Raasay					
Bracadale	3	1·96	1	0·12	E
	—	—	1	0·58	A
	—	—	1	0·21	B
Kilmuir	4	2·21	1	0·05	A
	—	—	1	0·03	B
Kingsburgh	2	4·75	—	—	—
Scorrybreck	—	—	1	0·07	B
Claigan	1	0·02	—	—	
Raasay (Rona Island)	—	—	1	949·00	G
	—	—	1	57·39	F
Western Isles					
Borve, Harris	3	0·94	—	—	
Luskentyre, Harris	1	0·97	—	—	
Benbecula	1	0·95	1	0·13	A
	—	—	1	0·10	A
	—	—	1	0·20	A
Eoligarry, Barra	—	—	1	0·08	A
TOTAL	22	75·98	14	1,008·86	

Keynote use:
[1] A = Residential.
B = Local authority—Recreation/residential.
C = Local authority—Roads/water.
D = Forestry Commission—Forestry.
E = Commercial—Private sector.
F = Government Department.
G = Private—Agricultural.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special educational needs appeals are currently lodged with his Department under section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980; what was the date on which each was received by his Department; and when he expects to give his decisions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* My Department has before it 28 outstanding complaints under section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 made to the Secretary of State about provision for special educational needs. Of these, 24 were lodged in 1991, two in 1992 and two in 1993.

Delays have been caused by the exceptional receipt of 47 complaints in 1991 compared with the usual average of three per year.

Decisions will be issued on all oustanding cases as soon as possible. One of these cases concerns one of the hon. Member's constituents. Subject to receipt of a response awaited from the education authority I expect the decision to be made in May.

Housing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to give special financial assistance to the housing estates within Glasgow, Pollok, constituency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* Glasgow district council's housing revenue account capital allocation for investment in council housing in 1993-94 is £87·045 million. It is for the council to determine its own priorities for the use of these substantial resources in the light of local circumstances, including investment in housing estates in the Pollok area if this is seen as a priority. In addition, Scottish Homes plans to invest £9·515 million in Pollok in 1993-94 through expenditure on its own stock, grants to housing associations and private sector housing providers. The bulk of this will be for rented housing and will enable site starts to be made on approximately 260 housing units. The urban programme is also currently funding a variety of projects in Pollok which are sponsored by Strathclyde regional council and Glasgow district council, including industrial improvements, addiction care and neighbourhood and business centres which total £1·285 million in capital costs and £587,000 in annual running costs.

Smear Tests

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if the terms of reference of the independent inquiry into the carrying out of smear tests at Inverclyde will include consideration of latest technologies available for checking slides;

(2) if the terms of reference of the independent inquiry into the carrying out of smear tests at Inverclyde will include the drawing up of a list of safeguards to ensure that the work is carried out to the highest possible standard.

Mr. Lang: The terms of reference of the independent inquiry are as follows:

To inquire into the circumstances which led to a review of 20,000 cervical smear test results for the period 1987 to early 1992 undertaken at Inverclyde hospital laboratory.

To report to the Minister of State and make recommendations.

These terms will enable the inquiry team to take account of all relevant matters and to make the recommendations which they consider appropriate. The matters to which you refer will be drawn to the attention of the inquiry team.

The membership of the inquiry team is as follows:

Chairperson
Dr. Euphemia McGoogan, senior lecturer in pathology, university of Edinburgh.
Member
Dr. Elizabeth Hudson, consultant cytopathologist, Northwick Park hospital, Middlesex.

The non-medical members are:
Ms Leeona Dorrian, advocate, Edinburgh.
Professor Nick Day, professor of public health, university of Cambridge.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to continue not to allow disconnections of domestic water supply in Scotland following reorganisation of water and sewerage services.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 14 December 1992 at column 79.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will carry out an assessment of the impact on *(a)* renal dialysis users and *(b)* people suffering from incontinence of the reorganisation of water and sewerage services in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* No decision on the future of water and sewerage services in Scotland has been taken. All relevant factors will be taken into account, once a decision has been taken.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total estimated expenditure necessary to bring water and sewerage standards in Scotland into line with all EC waste and water directives; and what is the likely time scale for carrying out that work.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Estimated expenditure on these directives totals £2·5 billion over the next 15 years.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the CBI, the Scottish Council

for Development and Industry and the National Federation of Small Businesses regarding the reorganisation of the water and sewerage services in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has held no such meetings.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the impact of the reorganisation of water and sewerage services in Scotland on *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* service industries.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* An objective of restructuring the water and sewerage services in Scotland is to achieve an efficient service at the lowest reasonable cost to both industrial and domestic consumers.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what way the future employment of people working in the water and sewerage service in Scotland is included in the assessment of options at present being undertaken; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* As the consultation paper "Investing for Our Future" made clear, staffing considerations will be taken fully into account in working out the detailed arrangements for the future of the services.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the British Medical Association and the British Association of Social Workers about the reorganisation of the water and sewerage services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The British Medical Association responded to the consultation paper "Investing For Our Future" and its response is on open file in St. Andrew's house library in Edinburgh. A copy can be obtained through the Library of the House. No representations have been received from the British Association of Social Workers.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current time scale for the reorganisation of the water and sewerage service in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The intention is that the reorganisation of water and sewerage services will proceed in parallel with the reform of local government.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amounts are included in the 1993-94 estimates, and the estimated expenditure for 1994-95 and 1995-96, for the reorganisation of the water and sewerage services in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Provision of £400,000 has been made in the current year to meet the costs of any further consultancy work which may be commissioned in connection with water and sewerage restructuring.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the consultants commissioned to carry out work on the options for the future of the water and sewerage service in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Quayle Munro Ltd.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the White Paper on the future of the water and sewerage services in Scotland will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* I will announce my decision on the future of water and sewerage services in Scotland in due course.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what level of cost-benefit analysis, efficiency audits and quality standards assessments have taken place in relation to the proposed reorganisation of the water and sewerage services in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Reform of local government will require reorganisation of the water and sewerage services. The consultation paper "Investing For Our Future" set out eight options. These are being examined in the light of responses to the consultation paper. The objective is to put in place a structure which is capable of providing services of the highest quality, at lowest reasonable cost to the consumer and which can maintain and improve safeguards for the environment.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the CBI about the reorganisation of water and sewerage services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The CBI responded to the consultation paper "Investing For Our Future", and its response is on open file in St. Andrew's house library in Edinburgh. A copy can be obtained through the Library of the House.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the full cost of the work done in the options for the future of the water and sewerage service in Scotland; and what were the costs of *(a)* the Quayle Munro consultancy, *(b)* the preparation, printing and publication of the consultative document, *(c)* other consultancy costs, *(d)* legal advice on the feasibility of the options being considered and *(e)* in-house costs.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The costs incurred on work on the options for the future structure of water and sewerage services in Scotland are as follows:

(a) The total cost of consultancy work undertaken by Quayle Munro Ltd. is £101,602. The original contract price was £50,000 as announced in my reply given to the hon. Member on 26 October 1992, *Official Report*, columns *530-31*. Since the report was submitted and used in the preparation of the consultation paper "Investing for our Future", further follow-up work has been commissioned and undertaken. The cost of this work was £51,602. These figures exclude value added tax.

(b) Printing and publication of the consultation paper "Investing for our Future" cost £11,838, including value added tax.

(c) No other consultancy costs have been incurred.

(d) No external legal advice has been obtained.

(e) The running costs of the division in the Scottish Office which deals with water and sewerage restructuring were £133,020 in 1992-93. Provision of £387,480 has been made to meet the costs of staff

working full time on this policy during 1993-94. Other staff work on this from time to time; it is not possible to provide an accurate figure at this time of the costs associated with their work.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the privatised water companies which have expressed an interest to his office on the issue of the future of Scotland's water and sewerage service.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 18 March 1993 at column *390*.

ENVIRONMENT

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to take account of the wider economic and social case when he considers the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on the public consultation process on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Maclean: All relevant considerations will be taken into account.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the external legal opinion obtained by his Department on the HMIP public consultation process on Sellafield's radioactive discharges and the THORP project.

Mr. Maclean: In line with the Government's usual practice, I do not intend to publish the legal opinion referred to.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to ensure that the Housing Corporation purchases land at a price fixed by valuation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation has the power, under section 88 of the Housing Associations Act 1985, to purchase land for certain purposes. However, it is its current policy, and has been for some time, not to do so. My Department has no proposals to encourage the corporation to do so.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 25 March concerning a constituent.

Mr. Baldry: I replied to the hon. Member's letter on Thursday 29 April.

Community Charge

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much community charge was outstanding to local authorities on 31 March; and if he will give details of the amount outstanding to each local authority.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* I will make an estimate of the level of community charge arrears for all local authorities at 31 March 1993 once collection figures for the fourth quarter of 1992-93 are available. There is insufficient information available centrally to make a reliable estimate for each local authority. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publishes estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1991 and 31 March 1992 are available in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Personal Social Services

12. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on implementation of the reductions in central Government personal social services expenditure in 1993-94.

Mr. Yeo: Central Government support for local authority personal social services is not being reduced in 1993-94. Overall standard spending this year, including the special transitional grant for community care, is £5,585 million, an increase of 15 per cent. on 1992-93.

26. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives of the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss the provision of personal social services during the current financial year.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met representatives of the Association of Directors of Social Services on 26 April.

Consultancies

13. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by regional health authorities on consultancies in the year 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: We do not collect information specifically on the cost of consultancies. However, expenditure on "contract staffing and consultancy services" by the 14 regional health authorities was some £27 million in 1991-92. This does not include expenditure at district level.

NHS Trusts

14. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for health what changes she is planning to the consultation precedure leading to the establishment of NHS trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to improve the public accountability of NHS trusts; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Every year each national health service trust issues a summary business plan and annual report, makes its accounts publicly available and holds a public meeting. In addition, the trusts issue a strategic plan every three years. This is a minimum requirement which many trusts exceed. It represents a high level of public accountability which requires no improvement.

Feathers Project

15. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how projects to help mental health patients and other invalids, such as the Feathers project, are funded by her Department; and what plans she has to increase the number of such projects.

Mr. Yeo: There are various schemes of grant support, including the mental illness specific grant, available for such projects. The level of funding under these schemes is reviewed annually.

Waiting Lists

16. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the current position on hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) earlier today.

21. **Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average time which patients had to wait for treatment *(a)* in March 1988 and *(b)* in March 1992.

Mr. Sackville: The latest data on patients admitted for treatment show 50 per cent. were admitted immediately and of those who were admitted from waiting lists half had waited less than five weeks. The average waiting time of patients on waiting lists has fallen from nine months in March 1988 to five months in March 1992.

22. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are waiting more than two years for surgery in the Worcester district health authority.

Mr. Sackville: None. Provisional figures show that there were no patients waiting more than a year in the Worcester district health authority as at 31 March 1993.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients had waited for treatment for over a year in the North Western region *(a)* in March 1991 and *(b)* in the latest month for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Latest provisional figures for 31 December 1992 show that since March 1991 the number of patients waiting for more than a year in North Western region has fallen by 48 per cent. from 14,078 to 7,332. In England over the same period the number waiting over a year fell by 52 per cent. to 80,585—the lowest figure ever recorded.

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients had waited for treatment for over a year in the South West Thames region *(a)* in March 1991 and *(b)* in the latest month for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Latest provisional figures for 31 December 1992 show that since March 1991 the number of patients waiting for more than a year in the South West Thames region has fallen by 62 per cent. from 8,969 to 3,383.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the patients charter guarantee that from 31 March no one should wait more than 18 months for a hip or knee joint replacement or a cataract operation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The guarantee has been successfully introduced. Reports from regions indicate that at 31 March 1993 there were no patients waiting more than 18 months for a hip replacement or a cataract operation and only eight patients waiting more than 18 months for a knee replacement. We are pressing the regions involved to ensure that these patients are treated immediately.

Private Investment

17. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy on private investment in the health service.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service is encouraged to use private finance where it gives the best value for money, so that public funds go further in buying services for NHS patients. Business cases for schemes above £10 million need central approval and those between £1 million and £10 million need regional approval, with sampling at national level.

Community Care

18. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to assess the ability of local authority social services departments to meet their statutory functions under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Yeo: Implementation of the community care reforms will be thoroughly monitored and evaluated. Regional health authorities and the social services inspectorate will monitor the progress made by authorities in a series of sample studies and a comprehensive round of monitoring in the autumn. A national users and carers group will also help to give users and carers perspective on the progress made. A research programme will evaluate the effect of the reforms. We will continue to receive detailed statistical and financial information. The Audit Commission is also undertaking its own monitoring.

28. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of progress of the community care reforms in Leicestershire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Our new community care arrangements came into operation in all parts of the country on 1 April. It is now for local health and social services authorities to make use of the opportunities they present. Our monitoring showed Leicestershire to be well prepared to take on its new opportunities to give users and carers a better service.

Junior Doctors

19. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to bring forward the date for achieving the target of an average of 72 hours per week for junior doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mayday Hospital, Croydon

20. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of income for the Mayday health care trust hospital, Croydon, in 1992-93; and what is the projected level of income for 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: The total income for the Mayday health care national health service trust in 1992-93 is forecast as £63,382,000. The trust is projecting a total income of £62,262,000 for 1993-94.

Adoption

23. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received in respect of the review of adoption law.

Mr. Yeo: The review received a general welcome. A total of 170 organisations and 179 individuals responded to the public consultation. All comments received have been given careful consideration in drawing up proposals for future legislation.

GP Fund Holders

24. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the cost-effectiveness of general practitioner fund holding.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioner fund holding represents excellent value for money, with improvements to patient care being delivered innovatively and efficiently.

25. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fund-holding practices are in operation in the South East Thames region; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Eighty-eight.

Prescription Charges

27. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations her Department has received regarding the payment for prescription charges by youth training scheme trainees.

Dr. Mawhinney: In the last 12 months we have received nine letters from hon. Members and one letter from a member of the public.

General Practitioners (London)

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there are in Greater London.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 1 October 1992—the latest date for which figures are available—there were 3,810 general medical practitioners in Greater London. This figure is still provisional.

Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of Coventry district health authority's latest proposals for Coventry and Warwickshire hospital; and what estimate has been made of the reduction in staff involved in the proposals.

Dr. Mawhinney: These are matters for Coventry district health authority and Walsgrave hospitals national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. A. R. Guy, the chairman of Coventry district health authority, for details.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what consultation process the proposals of Coventry district health authority for Coventry and Warwickshire hospital are required to be subject; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Community Health Council Regulations 1985 (SI No. 304) require a district health authority to consult the community health council over any proposals it has for substantial variations to services. Coventry district health authority is about to begin such an exercise in respect of Coventry and Warwickshire hospital.

Krypton Gas

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library copies of the results of research commissioned since 1978 by her Department on the possible health effects of the discharge of krypton gas into the environment.

Mr. Sackville: The National Radiological Protection Board has issued a number of publications which contain estimates of the collective exposures arising from routine discharges of radionuclides from United Kingdom sites: krypton 85 is among the radionuclides considered. The most recent of these is "NRPB-R231, Radiological impact of routine discharges from UK civil nuclear sites" published in 1990, a copy of which is in the Library.

Drug Prescribing

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the Pact system of monitoring prescribing in general practice in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Prescription analysis and cost (Pact) is an operational system of the Prescription Pricing Authority which was introduced in August 1988. The cost of operating the Pact system cannot be identified separately.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of abortions which have now been performed under the provisions of the Abortion Acts; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: A total of 3,591,618 legal abortions have been notified to the chief medical officers of England and Wales under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967—this covers the period from the time when the Act came into force on 27 April 1968 until 31 March 1992, the latest date for which figures, provisional, are available. Of these, 136 —0·004 per cent.—were performed in emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman".

NHS Supplies Authorities

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service trusts use, partly or entirely, suppliers other than the National Health Service Supplies Authority; and what is the difference in their costs from those which would be incurred if they used the authority for all supplies.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

High Security Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review the future of Rampton and Broadmoor hospitals.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 25 March at column *695*.

Social Services, Greenwich

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the change in standard spending assessment for social services in Greenwich if the 1991 census information were used for 1993-94.

Mr. Yeo: Population data from the 1991 census have already been incorporated in standard spending assessments (SSAs) for 1993-94. If information on social factors from the 1981 census were to be replaced by that available from the 1991 census, the SSA for personal social services for Greenwich for 1993-94 would increase by 9·8 per cent. The current review of SSAs will involve a number of further changes and may result in a different outcome when it is completed later this year.

Women Specialists

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her proposals to increase the number of women specialists.

Mr. Sackville: An increase in the number of women consultants is one of the goals of the Government's Opportunity 2000 initiative. Guidance has been issued on equal opportunities in the recruitment and selection of medical staff and objectives have been set for health authorities and trusts relating to the monitoring of candidates and the provision of training and guidance for chairs and other members of appointments committees. Steps are being taken to provide improved opportunities for flexible working and training—a report by the joint working party on flexible training is shortly to be published—and the reduction in the number of hours for which junior doctors are contracted will also make it easier for women with domestic commitments to undertake higher specialist training. In the surgical specialities, where the proportion of women is particularly low, the Department is providing funding to promote the women in surgical training scheme.

Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received concerning her decision to lift the ring-fence on grants to social services departments for drug and alcohol services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from organisations providing residential drug and alcohol projects concerning the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from organisations providing residential drug and alcohol projects concerning the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Yeo: The Department has received a number of representations from projects providing residential care for alcohol and drug misusers about the changes introduced by this Act. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have both also met the national voluntary organisations representing alcohol and drug misuse services, leading service providers and representatives of local authority associations to discuss the changes.

Dentistry

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there will be a decrease in her Department's contribution to the cost of dental treatment for non-exempt adults in the forthcoming year.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information will not be available until the financial year 1993-94 is complete.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health services authorities have been unable to provide emergency dental services in each week since 20 November 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information is contained in the table. General dental practitioners have an obligation under their terms of service to provide emergency cover to their registered patients. They may also offer emergency treatment to non-registered patients. Family health services authorities make arrangements for those patients who are not registered.

General dental service
Number of FHSAs unable to provide emergency dental treatment from week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

Week ending	*Number of FHSAs*
27 November 1992	7
4 December 1992	6
11 December 1992	6
18 December 1992	6
25 December 1992	[1]—
1 January 1993	[1]—
8 January 1993	6
15 January 1993	6
22 January 1993	6
29 January 1993	6
5 February 1993	6
12 February 1993	6
19 February 1993	6
26 February 1993	4
5 March 1993	7
12 March 1993	5
19 March 1993	5
26 March 1993	6
2 April 1993	6
9 April 1993	5

Week ending	Number of FHSAs
16 April 1993	5
23 April 1993	7

[1] No data were requested for weeks ending 25 December 1992 and 1 January 1993.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have contacted each FHSA asking for help in finding a dentist in each week since 20 November 1992; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information is contained in the tables.

Number of patients contacting FHSA asking for assistance in obtaining NHS dental treatment—week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Cleveland	3	10	4	3
Cumbria	138	120	65	80
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	4	6	5	2
Gateshead	3	3	1	4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	10	9	5	4
North Tyneside	6	1	0	2
South Tyneside	6	0	6	6
Sunderland	6	25	8	10
Humberside	114	121	102	89
North Yorkshire	22	10	16	15
Bradford	4	5	2	3
Calderdale	2	1	1	0
Kirklees	20	10	11	6
Leeds	50	20	35	30
Wakefield	16	11	5	6
Derbyshire	145	95	85	102
Leicestershire	7	14	23	17
Lincolnshire	0	1	1	0
Nottinghamshire	22	9	15	15
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	2	1	2	2
Sheffield	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	130	127	96	97
Norfolk	105	147	99	98
Suffolk	28	16	19	6
Bedfordshire	35	34	45	24
Hertfordshire	26	36	30	13
Barnet	9	10	10	12
Brent and Harrow	16	11	12	11
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	16	10	13	10
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0
Kensington Westminster	45	55	35	33
Essex	40	52	48	33
Barking and Havering	18	26	10	13
Camden and Islington	17	24	6	17
City and East London	63	63	49	41
Enfield and Haringey	28	14	19	20
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	16	16	9	12
East Sussex	68	53	53	49
Kent	175	149	128	137
Greenwich and Bexley	6	6	8	5
Bromley	41	49	35	12
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	20	32	12	18
Surrey	39	58	18	45
West Sussex	66	63	53	51
Croydon	7	8	6	4
Kingston and Richmond	25	35	33	40
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	14	0	24	21
Dorset	100	79	101	78
Hampshire	52	58	29	44
Wiltshire	83	77	91	72
Isle of Wight	47	29	33	27
Berkshire	66	65	68	57
Buckinghamshire	29	67	36	33
Northamptonshire	77	63	47	34
Oxfordshire	75	61	56	48
Avon	101	104	95	71
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	53	56	57	53
Devon	120	150	106	95
Gloucestershire	105	84	60	17
Somerset	28	13	9	20
Hereford and Worcester	58	23	37	23
Shropshire	34	31	32	33
Staffordshire	28	33	29	14

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Warwickshire	13	22	15	15
Birmingham	0	0	1	3
Coventry	12	6	2	23
Dudley	6	3	3	1
Sandwell	2	1	2	1
Solihull	3	4	4	4
Walsall	1	0	2	0
Wolverhampton	2	0	1	2
Cheshire	18	4	7	5
Liverpool	3	2	1	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	1	0
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	3	3	2	4
Lancashire	58	60	77	60
Bolton	6	4	0	2
Bury	0	0	2	0
Manchester	10	7	5	2
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	4	0	0	0
Salford	0	10	2	0
Stockport	0	0	1	0
Tameside	0	0	0	1
Trafford	3	0	5	0
Wigan	0	0	1	0
	2,834	2,685	2,280	2,060

FHSA	8 January[1]	15 January	22 January	29 January
Cleveland	10	6	0	20
Cumbria	138	42	56	60
Durham	0	0	3	7
Northumberland	8	3	4	4
Gateshead	5	8	0	3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	18	13	9	6
North Tyneside	6	1	4	0
South Tyneside	8	10	25	7
Sunderland	32	11	8	10
Humberside	195	132	140	128
North Yorkshire	25	41	34	35
Bradford	3	5	4	6
Calderdale	2	0	1	1
Kirklees	8	7	7	12
Leeds	72	45	59	62
Wakefield	9	2	0	2
Derbyshire	190	76	100	106
Leicestershire	35	20	0	25
Lincolnshire	3	2	3	2
Nottinghamshire	19	12	12	11
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	3	3	1	0
Sheffield	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	300	154	125	181
Norfolk	232	148	109	128
Suffolk	33	18	17	8
Bedfordshire	81	62	48	51
Hertfordshire	38	30	25	17
Barnet	18	24	40	34
Brent and Harrow	17	8	11	15
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	13	12	14	12
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0
Kensington Westminster	105	90	85	65
Essex	34	35	46	0
Barking and Havering	23	11	7	9
Camden and Islington	19	16	20	26
City and East London	136	57	66	74
Enfield and Haringey	23	14	14	14
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	7	6	5	8
East Sussex	94	60	80	61
Kent	190	171	160	145
Greenwich and Bexley	12	7	4	9
Bromley	43	36	49	39
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	49	39	18	20
Surrey	67	34	36	25
West Sussex	158	85	85	82

FHSA	8 January[1]	15 January	22 January	29 January
Croydon	12	8	9	6
Kingston and Richmond	53	47	40	30
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	57	27	22	20
Dorset	186	114	100	84
Hampshire	62	30	68	30
Wiltshire	162	70	89	75
Isle of Wight	148	94	134	50
Berkshire	92	58	50	35
Buckinghamshire	40	33	27	45
Northamptonshire	84	39	57	47
Oxfordshire	94	83	85	70
Avon	182	20	94	76
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	127	97	105	83
Devon	215	117	103	160
Gloucestershire	200	107	95	91
Somerset	15	12	8	6
Hereford and Worcester	82	44	31	35
Shropshire	71	35	36	42
Staffordshire	31	17	27	19
Warwickshire	26	17	17	29
Birmingham	5	4	3	2
Coventry	32	18	15	17
Dudley	4	1	2	2
Sandwell	2	4	2	3
Solihull	12	5	11	7
Walsall	0	0	2	2
Wolverhampton	8	3	7	4
Cheshire	7	14	8	6
Liverpool	2	2	0	3
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	1	0	1
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	6	4	6	9
Lancashire	79	43	85	82
Bolton	8	3	1	3
Bury	0	2	2	0
Manchester	6	3	4	4
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	0	0	0	0
Salford	5	10	5	3
Stockport	0	0	0	1
Tameside	0	0	0	1
Trafford	0	3	0	0
Wigan	0	0	1	1
	4,596	2,745	2,885	2,714

Note:
[1]Week ending 8 January included additional payments contacting the FHSA in the previous two weeks.

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Cleveland	0	0	0	1
Cumbria	65	50	70	72
Durham	3	3	3	3
Northumberland	3	5	1	0
Gateshead	4	4	6	3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	5	7	10	3
North Tyneside	2	0	0	2
South Tyneside	50	26	23	10
Sunderland	8	8	13	12
Humberside	95	86	102	74
North Yorkshire	22	35	44	41
Bradford	5	4	6	5
Calderdale	0	2	2	4
Kirklees	12	10	9	10
Leeds	70	39	44	51
Wakefield	4	2	1	3
Derbyshire	93	91	48	87
Leicestershire	32	26	24	31
Lincolnshire	3	0	1	2
Nottinghamshire	35	13	21	17
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	2	3	2	2
Sheffield	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	147	136	142	138
Norfolk	119	136	142	114

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Suffolk	17	18	21	18
Bedfordshire	52	55	69	52
Hertfordshire	41	26	48	24
Barnet	32	25	20	20
Brent and Harrow	11	14	8	11
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	11	74	10	10
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0
Kensington Westminster	73	74	64	41
Essex	37	38	44	34
Barking and Havering	13	19	21	17
Camden and Islington	16	12	12	9
City and East London	49	47	41	47
Enfield and Haringey	24	12	13	11
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	13	8	4	9
East Sussex	57	55	73	71
Kent	175	103	126	136
Greenwich and Bexley	5	4	5	18
Bromley	25	31	26	20
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	22	26	31	26
Surrey	37	23	20	25
West Sussex	103	52	41	83
Croydon	7	9	19	8
Kingston and Richmond	28	30	30	34
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	18	20	14	29
Dorset	99	111	82	103
Hampshire	78	97	54	60
Wiltshire	92	78	84	78
Isle of Wight	71	73	71	63
Berkshire	25	38	35	39
Buckinghamshire	43	45	37	55
Northamptonshire	50	40	52	42
Oxfordshire	60	81	80	62
Avon	76	84	89	107
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	109	77	97	91
Devon	167	110	162	119
Gloucestershire	71	40	669	63
Somerset	5	7	5	1
Hereford and Worcester	39	30	23	36
Shropshire	21	23	31	34
Staffordshire	20	14	33	28
Warwickshire	20	5	14	15
Birmingham	1	5	3	7
Coventry	20	11	17	12
Dudley	1	1	2	0
Sandwell	2	2	2	1
Solihull	12	5	7	8
Walsall	0	2	1	1
Wolverhampton	2	3	2	2
Cheshire	6	9	14	9
Liverpool	0	1	0	1
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	2	0	0
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	4	5	3	1
Lancashire	54	52	58	69
Bolton	4	2	4	7
Bury	0	1	1	0
Manchester	6	8	2	3
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	0	0	0	1
Salford	0	0	0	20
Stockport	3	3	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Wigan	1	1	1	0
	2,807	2,527	3,209	2,576

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Cleveland	13	3	3	3
Cumbria	26	130	119	100
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	2	0	2	2
Gateshead	5	1	2	3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	4	7	2	1
North Tyneside	0	1	0	1

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
South Tyneside	30	20	8	6
Sunderland	12	8	7	10
Humberside	73	86	82	83
North Yorkshire	17	32	31	34
Bradford	4	4	5	5
Calderdale	4	2	3	1
Kirklees	11	6	6	10
Leeds	35	38	36	43
Wakefield	0	3	2	7
Derbyshire	72	82	96	105
Leicestershire	21	20	21	23
Lincolnshire	2	2	2	0
Nottinghamshire	12	12	20	28
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	2	3	3	1
Sheffield	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	89	110	134	122
Norfolk	96	102	86	80
Suffolk	15	10	7	23
Bedfordshire	38	48	40	34
Hertfordshire	30	23	11	21
Barnet	18	20	18	23
Brent and Harrow	7	7	9	8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	12	10	19	8
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0
Kensington Westminster	43	37	40	53
Essex	43	41	33	41
Barking and Havering	13	9	9	7
Camden and Islington	20	23	10	18
City and East London	37	30	40	0
Enfield and Haringey	22	10	12	11
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	7	6	6	3
East Sussex	64	67	40	74
Kent	120	95	114	95
Greenwich and Bexley	16	23	15	9
Bromley	29	21	29	21
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	26	27	23	21
Surrey	25	29	13	15
West Sussex	69	58	40	39
Croydon	12	8	11	5
Kingston and Richmond	42	37	36	33
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	21	16	22	28
Dorset	100	88	94	108
Hampshire	56	38	27	27
Wiltshire	78	89	77	88
Isle of Wight	76	72	62	53
Berkshire	24	35	30	26
Buckinghamshire	49	56	50	45
Northamptonshire	42	36	30	38
Oxfordshire	67	78	59	54
Avon	97	75	78	94
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	63	64	93	123
Devon	110	135	150	126
Gloucestershire	65	76	73	65
Somerset	0	1	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	30	38	25	32
Shropshire	23	31	32	25
Staffordshire	12	26	18	19
Warwickshire	10	13	7	11
Birmingham	3	5	5	3
Coventry	18	26	15	26
Dudley	1	0	0	1
Sandwell	1	3	2	2
Solihull	5	5	2	9
Walsall	3	0	2	0
Wolverhampton	1	2	4	5
Cheshire	10	18	12	9
Liverpool	0	0	0	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	0	0
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	2	0	7	5
Lancashire	34	66	44	44
Bolton	3	6	2	1
Bury	2	0	2	0
Manchester	2	5	3	6
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	0	0	0	1

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Salford	5	0	0	10
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Wigan	1	0	0	0
	2,253	2,414	2,272	2,316

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Cleveland	4	0	3	9
Cumbria	80	54	43	51
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	3	1	2	5
Gateshead	1	0	0	2
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	5	5	2	4
North Tyneside	0	0	1	1
South Tyneside	11	10	2	10
Sunderland	8	8	8	11
Humberside	80	95	60	85
North Yorkshire	26	29	17	62
Bradford	4	5	4	4
Calderdale	2	2	2	0
Kirklees	10	10	5	9
Leeds	32	35	36	47
Wakefield	4	2	2	2
Derbyshire	71	70	87	92
Leicestershire	18	20	15	31
Lincolnshire	2	0	0	3
Nottinghamshire	15	31	9	30
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	1	2
Sheffield	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	130	170	101	142
Norfolk	92	96	66	107
Suffolk	23	30	22	20
Bedfordshire	56	35	5	54
Hertfordshire	28	15	15	23
Barnet	12	15	10	26
Brent and Harrow	10	14	6	8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	8	14	14	16
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0
Kensington Westminster	53	27	37	59
Essex	30	24	31	15
Barking and Havering	9	12	11	7
Camden and Islington	11	4	17	14
City and East London	44	46	103	36
Enfield and Haringey	12	8	16	16
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	4	2	5	2
East Sussex	51	27	53	75
Kent	106	113	107	121
Greenwich and Bexley	7	4	14	17
Bromley	39	20	18	27
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	18	18	18	32
Surrey	16	16	28	30
West Sussex	59	65	45	39
Croydon	9	6	6	2
Kingston and Richmond	28	27	34	38
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	21	17	24	14
Dorset	81	75	61	63
Hampshire	33	48	18	42
Wiltshire	71	88	55	94
Isle of Wight	67	35	51	66
Berkshire	29	19	26	45
Buckinghamshire	35	47	40	45
Northamptonshire	45	46	25	50
Oxfordshire	44	68	58	44
Avon	97	81	57	84
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	97	83	62	71
Devon	110	92	116	112
Gloucestershire	57	56	37	83
Somerset	0	1	1	0
Hereford and Worcester	41	45	18	53
Shropshire	25	34	32	22
Staffordshire	24	21	24	30

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Warwickshire	13	9	20	14
Birmingham	1	2	2	5
Coventry	20	17	8	30
Dudley	0	0	0	0
Sandwell	0	4	2	4
Solihull	6	10	1	0
Walsall	1	0	0	0
Wolverhampton	3	3	2	4
Cheshire	6	13	9	8
Liverpool	0	10	3	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	0	1
Sefton	0	1	1	0
Wirral	5	2	0	0
Lancashire	74	46	48	57
Bolton	5	1	2	5
Bury	0	3	2	0
Manchester	7	6	5	4
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	1	1	0	0
Salford	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	2	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	4	2
Wigan	2	3	0	0
	2,255	2,174	1,895	2,440

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have reported to each FHSA that they have been unable to arrange NHS dental treatment in each week since 20 November 1992; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Since week ending 27 November 1992 only one family health services authority (FHSA), Norfolk, has reported that they have been unable to arrange treatment for some patients. The number of patients each week is contained in the table. The number of patients they have been unable to assist has been decreasing steadily from a high of 228 in week ending 26 March 1993 to 98 in week ending 23 April 1993. The FHSA is satisfied that national health service dental treatment can now be arranged for all patients requesting it.

General Dental Service

Week ending	Number of patients Norfolk FHSA unable to arrange NHS dental treatment
27 November 1992	129
4 December 1992	139
11 December 1992	146
18 December 1992	158
25 December 1992	No data
1 January 1993	No data
8 January 1993	186
15 January 1993	188
22 January 1993	188
29 January 1993	202
5 February 1993	209
12 February 1993	220
19 February 1993	228
26 February 1993	228
5 March 1993	228
12 March 1993	228
19 March 1993	228
26 March 1993	228
2 April 1993	191
9 April 1993	160
16 April 1993	130
23 April 1993	98

No data were requested for weeks ending 25 December 1992 and 1 January 1993

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many FHSAs have referred patients who have been unable to obtain treatment from a general dental practitioner to *(a)* the community dental service, *(b)* the hospital dental service and *(c)* a salaried dentist, in each week since July 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information is not held in the form requested. The number of family health services authorities which have referred patients who have been unable to obtain treatment from a general dental practitioner in the community dental service, hospital dental service or a salaried dentist is shown in the table.

General dental service

Number of FHSAs referring patients to CDS, HDS or salaried dentist from week ending 3 July 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

Week ending	Number of FHSAs
3 July 1992	20
10 July 1992	24
17 July 1992	19
24 July 1992	18
31 July 1992	22
7 August 1992	26
14 August 1992	21
21 August 1992	24
28 August 1992	25
4 September 1992	23
11 September 1992	26

Week ending	Number of FHSAs
18 September 1992	23
25 September 1992	24
2 October 1992	22
9 October 1992	24
16 October 1992	23
23 October 1992	24
30 October 1992	26
6 November 1992	28
13 November 1992	28
20 November 1992	27
27 November 1992	25
4 December 1992	26
11 December 1992	27
18 December 1992	27
25 December 1992	[1]—
1 January 1993	[1]—
8 January 1993	25
15 January 1993	28
22 January 1993	31
29 January 1993	30
5 February 1993	25
12 February 1993	26
19 February 1993	30
26 February 1993	28
5 March 1993	27
12 March 1993	28
19 March 1993	27
26 March 1993	25
2 April 1993	25
9 April 1993	25
16 April 1993	25
23 April 1993	23

[1] No data were requested for weeks ending 25 December 1992 and 1 January 1993.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have given written notice to each FHSA to remove their names from the dental list since 20 November; and what is the total for this period.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information requested is contained in the table. The total number of dentists who have given written notice to family health services authorities to remove their names from the dental list since 20 November is 56. At 31 December 1992, the latest information held, there were 15,280 dentists in England compared with 15,308 at 31 December 1991.

Number of dentists giving written notice to remove their names from the dental list—week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Humberside	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	1	0	0	0
Kensington West and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Barking and Havering	1	1	0	0
City and East London	0	0	1	0
Enfield and Haringey	1	1	0	1
East Sussex	1	0	0	0
Kent	2	2	0	0
Greenwich and Bexley	1	0	0	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	1	0
Bolton	0	0	4	0
Stockport	0	2	1	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Total	7	6	7	1

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Humberside	0	0	1	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	1	0	0
Barking and Havering	2	0	0	0
City and East London	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	5	2	0	1
East Sussex	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Total	7	3	1	1

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Humberside	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	1	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	0

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Barking and Havering	0	0	0	0
City and East London	0	0	2	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	0
Bromley	0	1	1	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	1
Total	1	1	3	1

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Humberside	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	1	0	0
Kensington West and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Barking and Havering	0	0	0	0
City and East London	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	2
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	1
Total	0	1	0	3

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April	Total
Humberside	0	0	0	0	1
Calderdale	1	0	0	0	4
Barking and Havering	0	1	0	0	5
Kensington West and Chelsea	0	0	0	0	1
City and East London	2	0	0	3	8
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0	11
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	1
Kent	0	1	0	1	6
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	0	3
Bromley	0	0	0	0	2
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0	1
Bolton	1	2	0	0	7
Stockport	0	0	0	0	3
Trafford	1	0	0	0	3
Total	5	4	0	4	56

Note: No dentists have asked for their names to be removed from the dental list in the other 76 FHSAs.

Specialist Training

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Government's proposals for specialist training and accreditation.

Dr. Mawhinney: A working group was established last year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider the current system of specialist medical training in this country in the light of the European Community medical directives. The group has completed its work and presented its report. This makes wide-ranging recommendations which, if implemented, would have major implications for the way in which we train our doctors and provide health care to patients in national health service hospitals. We have, therefore, decided to seek the widest possible range of views on the recommendations before any decisions are reached. The report is being issued today for consultation. Copies will be placed in the Library.

NHS Staff (Redundancies)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions have been made in each regional health authority for staff redundancy payments in 1993-94; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. No specific budget would be allocated to regional health authorities for redundancy payments; any such costs would be met from their overall allocation.

Nurses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are currently employed in the national health service; at what average salary; and what were the equivalent figures in 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The number of nurses and midwives—whole-time equivalents—employed in the national health service at 30 September 1991 and at 30 September 1979, excluding agency staff, are as follows:

	Adjusted
[1]1979	378,050
1991	392,200

[1] The 1979 figure has been adjusted to reflect the fact that in 1980-81 the working week reduced from 40 to 37·5 hours.

An estimated average annual nurse's salary is £14,560 with effect from 1 April 1992. This figure represents the basic staff nurse (scale D) earnings. There is no comparable figure available for 1979.

AIDS

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people to date in the United Kingdom are recorded as having died from AIDS exclusively as a result of heterosexual activity.

Mr. Sackville: In the United Kingdom up to 31 March 1993, 349 deaths from AIDS had been recorded where the probable mode of transmission was heterosexual intercourse.

Mr. Mohammed Saeed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will appoint an independent inquiry to investigate the circumstances in which Mohammed Saeed practised as a general practitioner in Bradford although unqualified, and on the handling of complaints about Mr. Saeed during this time; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The circumstances surrounding the case have been thoroughly investigated by the courts and the Department, and I do not consider that any purpose would be served by appointing an independent inquiry.

Children's Hospices

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants were made to children's hospices by health authorities in the financial year 1992-93; if she will list the hospices to which grants were made and the amounts given; what she expects the total amount allocated to such hospices in the current financial year to be; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available centrally.

National health service management executive letter EL(93)14, a copy of which is available in the Library, explains our intention that in future both adult and children's hospices should be supported within the general system of health service funding through the contracts which health authorities and fund-holding general practitioners make with providers in both the NHS and voluntary sectors.

Health Managers

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of performance-related pay for senior management to date in each English health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Condensation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned into illness resulting from condensation in the home; and what is the estimated cost to the health service each year of such illnesses.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has commissioned no such research.

Listeria

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many listeria cases were reported in 1992; and what assessment she has made of the effects of initiatives to combat the condition.

Mr. Sackville: In 1992, 112 cases of listeriosis in England and Wales were reported to the public health laboratory service. This figure is provisional.

Listeriosis in this country remains a rare disease and its incidence has declined significantly since 1988, when there were 288 cases. The Chief Medical Officer continues to advise pregnant women and the immuno-compromised to avoid high risk foods such as pâté and soft ripened cheeses. Advice about safe eating is kept under review.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to assess the ability of local authority social services departments to meet their statutory functions in relation to community care for disabled people.

Mr. Yeo: The preparations of every local authority social services department, for the third stage of the Government's community care reforms which were implemented on 1 April 1993, were regularly monitored by the Department's social services inspectorate. We will continue to monitor the performance of all local authorities in implementing community care over the next year, and make a special study of the implications for disabled people in a sample of authorities.

London Health Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will provide a breakdown of the sources of funding to be used to improve primary and community health facilities in London; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will publish a table showing the total sums allocated from existing regional health authority budgets to pay for primary and community health care initiatives in London; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Funding of primary care developments in London will be resourced from a combination of central funds together with a shift over time in the balance of

existing funding in the Thames regions towards primary care, as suggested in "Making London Better". In 1993-94 these funds will amount to £40 million.

In addition, the Government are making available £2·5 million from funds for centrally financed services to resource new voluntary sector initiatives in 1993-94, and will maintain funding at this level in 1994-95 and 1995-96. A further £1 million from central funds is being made available to launch the primary care challenge fund in 1993-94.

This total of £43·5 million is additional to what would otherwise have been spent on primary care in London this year.

Further details of the funding arrangements for 1993-94 will be announced shortly when the London implementation group has made public its decisions on the development plans produced by family health services authorities within the London initiative zone.

Funding arrangements for the main primary care development programmes will be kept under review, year by year, as primary care plans are firmed up and acute sector reconfiguration proceeds. The Government are committed to investing £170 million of additional expenditure on capital projects in the London initiative zone over the next six years from 1993-94 and to ensuring that there is associated revenue investment to bring London's primary care services up to an appropriate standard by the end of the century.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the money earmarked for investment in primary health facilities in London in 1993-94 is additional to the funds earmarked for the NHS in the Chancellor's autumn statement; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. The funding for the national health service in 1993-94 announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement anticipated the need to increase investment in primary health facilities in London as part of the implementation of "Making London Better". Private finance will be considered as a source of additional funds where it can be demonstrated to be a cost effective way of improving services to NHS patients.

Vitamin K

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what future discussions are planned between the Medicines Control Agency and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry about the development of an oral preparation of vitamin K.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of any discussions between the Medicines Control Agency and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry in relation to applications for product licences are not disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Meat Products

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many registered premises were available for the manufacturing of meat foods to be sold in the retail market in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988;

(2) how many registered premises that manufactured meat foods for the retail market in the United Kingdom have closed in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: Premises producing meat-based products were required to register with local authorities under the Food Act 1984. This requirement was superseded by the requirement in the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 that all premises used for food business, including those producing meat foods, are liable to be registered with the local food authority. In neither case are details held centrally.

HOME DEPARTMENT

British National Party

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he routinely receives from the Metropolitan police on the membership and activities of the British National party.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Civil Defence Regulations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what arrangements he has made to issue draft new Civil Defence (Grant) Regulations for consultation; when the draft was circulated for consultation; to whom the draft was circulated for consultation; what was the date notified for the submission of comments on the proposals; what comments his Department has received on his draft proposals; if he will list those organisations and individuals that submitted comments; what plans he has to issue revised proposals; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy in any forthcoming civil defence regulations to place a duty upon local authorities to consult with any body or organisation specified in directions given to them by the designated Minister;

(3) if he will make it his policy in any forthcoming civil defence regulations to place a duty upon local authorities to consult with bodies other than local authorities in the making of emergency plans;

(4) what arrangements he has made to issue draft new Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations for consultation; when the draft was circulated for consultation; to whom the draft was circulated for consultation; what was the date notified for the submission of comments on the proposals; what comments his Department has received on the draft proposals; if he will list those organisations and individuals that submitted comments; what plans he has to issue revised proposals; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he will make it his policy in any forthcoming civil defence regulations to give local authorities the power to take preparatory steps to implement emergency plans without having received a request from the designated Minister;

(6) if he will make it his policy in any forthcoming civil defence regulations to place a duty upon local authorities to arrange for the training of persons other than local authority staff;

(7) if he will make it his policy in any forthcoming civil defence regulations to place a duty upon local authorities to plan for mitigating the effects of occurrences involving destruction of or danger to life or property other than those designated as emergencies or disasters;

(8) if he will ensure that any new civil defence regulations introduced in England and Wales are consistent with those proposed to be introduced in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Draft Civil Defence (Grant) (Amendment) Regulations and (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations were issued in England and Wales on 3 December 1992 for comments to be received by 22 January 1993. They were sent to the Association of County Councils, Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Association of London Authorities, London Boroughs Association, Association of District Councils, chief executives of county councils, London boroughs and metropolitan districts, the town clerk of the Corporation of London, clerks to the fire and civil defence authorities, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, county Emergency Planning Officers Society, Society of Industrial Emergency Services Officers, National Council for Civil Protection, Emergency Planning Association and the civil protection co-ordination group.

Comments have been received, and considered from the local authority associations, some 30 chief executives, the other organisations and also from the Institute of Civil Defence and Disaster Studies, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, British Red Cross and National Voluntary Aids Society.

The draft Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations will be laid before Parliament for approval as soon as possible and will be made available for information to those who were consulted. Following the consultations, it is not proposed to proceed with the draft Civil Defence (Grant) (Amendment) Regulations.

I propose to include provision in the draft regulations requiring local authorities to comply with any directions which are given by the designated Minister in the exercise of their functions, including consultation; for relevant local authorities and, where appropriate, fire and civil defence authorities only to be consulted in the making of plans; for local authorities, where they think it appropriate, to take preparatory steps to implement plans without a request from the designated Minister; and for local authorities to arrange training of persons other than their own staff.

A duty requiring plans for mitigating the effects of occurrences involving destruction of or danger to life or property will not be included. Local authorities will however be encouraged to develop broadly based plans which will enable them to respond to all kinds of emergencies.

The principles of the draft regulations will be consistent with those for Scotland.

MDEA

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what communication he has had with his Netherlands opposite number about the drug MDEA; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: My Department has raised with the Dutch enforcement agencies and at official level our concern at the amount of MDEA of Dutch origin which is seized in the United Kingdom. I shall study the reports resulting from these contacts with great care.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list nationals of the former Yugoslavia by country of origin, living in the United Kingdom, to the latest date, under their immigration status; how many have *(a)* applied to vary their permission to remain in the United Kingdom and *(b)* have lodged appeals against refusal to remain in the United Kingdom and are awaiting decisions on applications to remain in the United Kingdom;

(2) how many nationals of the former Yugoslavia are living in the United Kingdom; if he will list the numbers by country of origin; and how many have entered the United Kingdom since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on total passenger admissions from the former Yugoslavia in the years 1990-92 is given in the table.

Nationals of the former Yugoslavia given leave to enter the United Kingdom[1]

	Number of persons
1990	69,700
1991	59,800
1992	[2]50,100

[1]The majority were visitors who were given leave to enter for up to six months.

[2]Provisional figure.

Comprehensive reliable information on embarkations is not available.

In the period January 1992 to March 1993 inclusive, around 6,300 nationals of the former Yugoslavia—excluding dependants—applied for asylum in the United Kingdom, 2,220 at ports on arrival and 4,080 after entry. The large majority of these applications are still under consideration.

Comprehensive information on recent applications to vary leave is not yet available. For information on decisions in 1992 on variation of leave applications I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 March 1993, column *448*.

Information about appeals against refusals of variation of leave applications is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Transport

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the deaths that have occurred in cellular vans over the last 10 years, citing name, place, date and inquest result; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Cellular vans are used by both police and prison services.

I understand from the director general of the Prison Service that no deaths have occurred in cellular vans used by the Prison Service or by a firm contracted by the Prison Service to provide escort services.

One death has occurred in a cellular vehicle used by the police. On 19 June 1989, Mr. Terence O'Shea, a 43-year-old remand prisoner, died in a Lancashire constabulary prisoner transport vehicle while in transit between Blackpool magistrates court and Her Majesty's remand centre, Risley. Staff had checked Mr. O'Shea's cell

at various times en route, but he was found to be collapsed on arrival at destination. A police surgeon had certified him fit to be detained although he was suffering from alcohol withdrawal symptoms. Cause of death was heatstroke. At the inquest a verdict of accidental death was recorded.

Laboratory Animals

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in setting a target date after which the use of wild-caught primates in British research laboratories will be prohibited.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have already made substantial progress towards phasing out the use of wild-caught primates in British laboratories, and are discussing a Community-wide approach to this issue with our EC partners. The matter will be raised again later in the year at the meeting of EC national competent authorities established under directive 86/609/EEC.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider implementing a formal training programme for unlicensed junior laboratory technicians dealing with laboratory animals.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office code of practice makes it clear that all those responsible for laboratory animals must be properly trained and competent, and that it is the responsibility of the named day-to-day care person to ensure that adequate training is provided for all personnel.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has considered the complaints made against Wickham Research Laboratories about breaches of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and what action he intends to take on them.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have carefully considered a detailed report by the Home Office inspectorate carried out following allegations made about the conduct of animal procedures at Wickham research laboratories, but it would be inappropriate for me to disclose details at this stage until the results of the investigation have been communicated to Wickham research laboratories and it has had the opportunity to comment.

Forensic Science Service Agency

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set for the Forensic Science Service Agency for 1993-94.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: During 1993-94 I shall expect the FSS to continue to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. The financial targets are recovery of full economic costs, a unit cost of £452 with an efficiency gain of 1·6 per cent. The service level targets are to improve turnround times on average by 12 per cent. over 1992-93 meeting specific target dates for seven types of offence, and to achieve accreditation to the national measurement accreditation service and BS5750 standards in all six operational laboratories.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 May 1993

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost, including redundancy payments, incurred by his Department as a result of the abandonment of the prison service supply and transport market test.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John McAllion, dated 4 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the costs incurred as a result of the abandonment of the Prison Service supply and transport market test.

In July 1992 approval was given for the award of a contract, subject to negotiation of satisfactory terms and consultation with the TUS, to Beck and Pollitzer for the operation of the warehousing and distribution function of the Prison Service Supply and Transport Branch. The operative date of the contract was to be 1 April 1993.

At the time of this decision, it was anticipated that all staff working in the function would be made redundant, although some might be re-employed by Beck and Pollitzer. The estimated redundancy payments for all the staff were £875,000.

As it was not possible to negotiate a satisfactory contract with Beck and Pollitzer, a 3-year service level agreement was awarded to the next best bid, the in-house bid. Staff, who had received redundancy notices in September 1992, were given the option of accepting redundancy or agreeing to the withdrawal of the redundancy notice. Redundancy payments to those who decided to accept redundancy were £620,000.

The Prison Service did not incur any other costs as a result of the abandonment of the market test.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contract was awarded to Beck and Politzer following the abandonment of the prison service supply and transport market test; whether it was a result of a competitive tendering exercise; and whether an in-house bid was permitted.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John McAllion, dated 4 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the contract awarded to Beck and Politzer.

Following the decision to award a 3-year service level agreement for the in-house management of the Prison Service Supply and Transport warehousing and distribution function, a 1-year consultancy contract was agreed with Beck and Politzer to provide the in-house management team with advice and assistance in achieving operational and administrative improvements to the function.

A great deal of preparatory work was carried out by Beck and Politzer in the seven months from the original decision to award them the contract for the management of the function up to the decision to retain the work in-house and this latter decision was made only 4 weeks before the operative date of 1 April 1993. There was therefore not time to arrange for competitive tendering, nor would it have been practical for either another contractor or an in-house team to act as consultants, as the new computer systems to be used after 1 April for stock control and distribution planning were based on the original Beck and Politzer proposal. They were therefore the only organisation capable of providing the necessary consultancy advice.

The agreement reached with Beck and Politzer is an example of the private sector working closely with the public sector to enhance services quality and provide value for money.

Prison Transport

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements are laid down on how meals are to be provided by Group 4 to prisoners being held in court and police cells while awaiting or during trial; and if these will be hot meals.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of Mr. Lewis, the Director General, the Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what requirements are laid down on how meals are to be provided by Group 4 to prisoners being held in court and police cells whilst awaiting or during trial; and if these will be hot meals.

The contract with Group 4 Court Services Limited requires the contractor to feed all prisoners who are in its custody at any time between the hours of 1100 and 1400. The lunchtime meal need not be regarded as the main meal of the day, but should be such as to sustain the prisoner until he or she is escorted to the prison or otherwise dealt with. Fresh drinking water should be available to prisoners on request throughout the day. This is in line with guidance to Governors in respect of prisoners held at courts staffed by the Prison Service. Breakfast and tea meals will ordinarily be given either by the police or Prison Service as appropriate.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost currently paid by the prison service for each new cellular van to be constructed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the temporary absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the cost paid by the Prison Service for new cellular vans.

The last cellular van purchased by the Prison Service was in July 1991, for a 14-cell van with air-conditioning, at a total cost of £50,667 exclusive of VAT. The last 12-cell van was purchased in September 1990 at a total cost of £47,275 exclusive of VAT. Air-conditioning was fitted to this van in July 1991 at an additional cost of £7,173 exclusive of VAT.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the location, date, list of injuries and cost of repairs incurred in road accidents in

1990, 1991 and 1992 involving *(a)* cellular vans and *(b)* other means of transporting prisoners (i) in England and Wales and (ii) in the east midlands and Humberside area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the transport of prisoners.

Only a relatively small number of prisoner movements are by cellular vehicle. In fact the use of cellular vehicles by the Prison Service only began in 1990 and so far only 26 are in use. Apart from those prisoners conveyed by Group 4 most prisoners are escorted to magistrates' courts and the Crown Court, and between establishments, by Prison Service staff but using contract hire taxis and coaches. Movements from magistrates' courts to prisons are undertaken by the police using their vehicles. (In some areas, eg in London, the police also convey prisoners to magistrates' courts, but are paid for this service by the Prison Service.) We do not therefore have the information with which to answer your question.

We do however have information on the amount spent on repairs, and in settlement of third party claims, in respect of accidents involving Prison Service cellular vehicles. The only years for which the information is complete are 1990 (when these vehicles first began to be used by the Prison Service) and 1991. The information is as follows:

	All areas £	*East Midlands and Humberside* £
1990	264	nil
1991	2,354·50	618

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoner custody officers are employed by Group 4 Court Escort Services Ltd.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of prisoner custody officers employed by Group 4 Court Escort Services Ltd.

Group 4 currently have 288 staff employed to undertake prisoner custody officer duties as part of the court escort service in the East Midlands and Humberside.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the running costs incurred during 1992 for transporting prisoners in the east midlands and Humberside area; and if he will give a breakdown of the costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of Mr. Lewis, the Director General, the Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the running costs incurred during 1992 for transporting prisoners in the East Midlands and Humberside area.

Our estimate of the operational staff costs in 1993-94 prices is £9·0 million. This excludes overheads, vehicle costs, catering and medical support. Neither the Prison Service nor the police can readily identify these additional costs. By contrast the total cost under the contract is £8·1 million (excluding VAT, which is reclaimable). This sum contains the cost of administrative and management back-up, together with costs of catering, medical support, accommodation (headquarters, control centre and vehicle bases), vehicles and IT. Of the £9·0 million, £6·0 million is attributable to police costs, and £2·8 million to Prison Service costs.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoner transport movements were made in the east midlands and Humberside area during 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the temporary absence of Mr. Lewis, the Director General from the office, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of prisoner transport movements made in the East Midlands and Humberside area during 1992.

Data on prisoner movements is not collected centrally. Survey work conducted last summer indicated an annual rate in the area of about 50,000 prisoner movements from police stations and prisons to courts. More detailed data for 1993 will become available in due course from the contractor's management information system.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the number and types of vehicles Group 4 has in its fleet for transporting prisoners under the private escort service in the east midlands and Humberside.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Group 4's fleet of vehicles for the court escort service in the East Midlands and Humberside.

Group 4 are using 70 vehicles, of which 57 are cellular vehicles, three are personnel carriers and 10 saloon cars.

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost in *(a)* money and *(b)* man hours of retaking prisoners who escape while in the charge of Group 4 personnel.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Mr. David Young, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost and man hours involved in the re-taking of prisoners who have escaped from the custody of Group 4 personnel.

The nature and circumstances of incidents of escapes differ widely from one case to the next and the Prison Service is not charged for costs incurred in recapturing prisoners. The information requested is not, therefore, available.

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the contract with Group 4 to provide prisoner escort services contains penalty clauses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Mr. David Young, dated 4 May 1993:

In the absence of Mr. Lewis, the Director General, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about penalty clauses in the contract with Group 4 Court Services Ltd. for the provision of the court escort service in the East Midlands and Humberside.

The contract with Group 4 contains mechanisms which allow adjustments to payments to be made in the event of circumstances occurring which fall outside the terms of the contract. Where a material failure is caused by circumstances within the contractor's control and is not corrected within 20 days of it being brought to his attention, the Prison Service may terminate the contract.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to allow male and female prisoners to travel in the same vehicle while being escorted to court; and if he will call for an investigation into an incident on Tuesday 20 April when a female prisoner was put with male prisoners in a vehicle operated by Group 4 Court Escort Services Ltd. with no female custody officer present.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 5 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your recent Parliamentary question about male and female prisoners being escorted in the same vehicle.

The Prison Service has no objection in principle to escorting male and female prisoners to court together as long as the escort is properly staffed and supervised. The contract with Group 4 requires the separation of male and female prisoners, but the Prison Service is content that such separation be achieved by placing prisoners in separate compartments of a cellular vehicle. Where it is judged in the prisoner's interest to be escorted rather than to await the arrival of a female PCO, a female prisoner may be escorted by male PCOs. The contract with Group 4 states that the general presumption will be that a female officer will accompany a female prisoner, and that escorts of females by male Prisoner Custody Officers will be very much the exception.

Prison Regime (Code of Standards)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he is making with the establishment of a code of standards for the prison regime; when he expects the code to be ready for issue; what account he has taken of previous recommendations on the subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from I. Dunbar to Mr. Harry Greenway, dated May 1993:

In the temporary absence of the Director General, Mr. Lewis, the Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about progress on establishing a code of standards for the Prison Service.

Following two public consultation seminars last year on the aims of a code of standards, drafting of the code is now well underway in the Prison Service. Standards are being drafted to reflect the Prison Service's responsibilities towards both the public and prisoners, and will take account of the views expressed in the Woolf Report, the Government White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice", and comments received during consultation.

The code will be published in December 1993.

Prison Education Service

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many redundancies he expects as a result of the tendering out of the prison education service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The staff who provide education services in prison establishments are not employed by the prison service. Decisions on redundancy are a matter for the employer and it is not yet possible to quantify whether and to what extent staff currently employed in delivering education services in prisons may be made redundant following competitive tendering.

Fire Service, Wales

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to improve the efficiency and response times of each fire service in Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government are concerned to ensure that all fire authorities in Wales conform to the minimum nationally recommended standards of fire cover, and that they do so as efficiently and economically as possible. The primary responsibility for providing an efficient fire service rests with the fire authority and the chief officer of the fire brigade. Each brigade in Wales is inspected annually by Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services to ensure that fire authorities are operating as efficiently as possible and continuing to meet acceptable standards of fire cover.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes exist in each county in Wales for each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: Information on the number of neighbourhood watch schemes is recorded at police force level and so it is not possible to attribute schemes to individual Welsh counties. The number of schemes recorded by the police at the end of each year in question is given in the following table:

Neighbourhood watch schemes in Wales

Force	Number of neighbourhood watch schemes					
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Dyfed-Powys	108	514	719	807	940	1,102
Gwent	3	10	17	22	35	113
North Wales	1,135	1,572	1,812	1,787	2,061	2,615
South Wales	500	510	638	546	821	1,141
Total	1,746	2,606	3,186	3,162	3,857	4,971

Victim Support

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's policy for funding and supporting Victim Support.

Mr. Jack: The Government attach importance to the work of Victim Support in providing both practical help and advice and emotional support to victims of crime. There are currently about 380 branches and schemes with some 8,000 volunteer visitors covering 98 per cent. of the population of England and Wales. They handle about 800,000 cases a year.

Home Office grant to the national charity Victim Support will amount to £8·4 million this year. This is an increase of 15 per cent. over last year's provision, which itself represented a 28 per cent. increase over the previous year's.

Police Forces

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, for each police authority in England, for the most recent year for which figures are available, *(a)* the number of police officers, *(b)* the number of civilian staff, *(c)* the population in the area covered and *(d)* the ratio of officers and staff to population; and what were the comparable figures for 1978-79.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows:

Force As at 31 March 1979	Police strength	Civilian strength	Force population[1]	Police authority/ population ratio
Avon and Somerset	2,825	686	1,328,000	1:378
Bedfordshire	902	277	490,000	1:415
Cambridgeshire	1,064	302	564,000	1:413
Cheshire	1,778	397	914,000	1:420
Cleveland	1,334	308	569,000	1:363
Cumbria	1,056	250	474,000	1:363
Derbyshire	1,563	636	897,000	1:408
Devon and Cornwall	2,660	752	1,361,000	1:399
Dorset	1,128	281	583,000	1:414
Durham	1,312	505	608,000	1:335
Essex	2,461	686	1,357,000	1:431
Gloucestershire	1,076	231	493,000	1:377
Greater Manchester	6,419	1,415	2,675,000	1:341
Hampshire	2,949	698	1,564,000	1:429
Hertfordshire	1,462	370	799,000	1:436
Humberside	1,849	499	845,000	1:360
Kent	2,724	887	1,445,000	1:400
Lancashire	3,097	879	1,368,000	1:344
Leicestershire	1,701	363	833,000	1:404
Lincolnshire	1,171	314	530,000	1:357
Merseyside	4,472	914	1,562,000	1:290
Norfolk	1,223	248	675,000	1:459
Northamptonshire	905	254	514,000	1:443
Northumbria	3,272	768	1,465,000	1:362
North Yorkshire	1,342	338	654,000	1:389
Nottinghamshire	2,117	561	974,000	1:364
South Yorkshire	2,546	599	1,304,000	1:414
Staffordshire	1,978	571	994,000	1:390
Suffolk	1,064	329	588,000	1:422
Surrey	1,440	360	726,000	1:403
Sussex	2,758	723	1,278,000	1:367
Thames Valley	2,639	970	1,723,000	1:477
Warwickshire	841	204	467,000	1:447
West Mercia	1,743	493	963,000	1:431
West Midlands	5,981	1,418	2,730,000	1:369
West Yorkshire	4,727	1,186	2,073,000	1:351
Wiltshire	997	251	514,000	1:412
City of London	829	275	6,000	1:5
Metropolitan	22,214	12,443	7,445,000	1:215

[1]Population figures provided by OPCS June 1977.

Force As at 31 December 1992	Police strength	Civilian strength	Force population[1]	Police authority/ population ratio
Avon and Somerset	3,065	1,120	1,431,000	1:342
Bedfordshire	1,119	391	534,000	1:354
Cambridgeshire	1,265	446	670,000	1:392
Cheshire	1,901	543	967,000	1:396
Cleveland	1,492	473	558,000	1:284
Cumbria	1,197	414	490,000	1:304
Derbyshire	1,810	588	940,000	1:392
Devon and Cornwall	2,920	1,048	1,515,000	1:382
Dorset	1,318	553	663,000	1:354
Durham	1,377	541	604,000	1:315
Essex	2,917	1,088	1,477,000	1:369
Gloucestershire	1,148	373	539,000	1:354
Greater Manchester	7,055	2,539	2,562,000	1:267
Hampshire	3,287	1,089	1,705,000	1:390
Hertfordshire	1,688	594	843,000	1:369
Humberside	2,033	699	874,000	1:320
Kent	3,106	1,107	1,539,000	1:365
Lancashire	3,209	1,071	1,408,000	1:329
Leicestershire	1,834	667	891,000	1:356
Lincolnshire	1,191	483	593,000	1:354
Merseyside	4,656	1,638	1,441,000	1:229
Norfolk	1,426	460	759,000	1:402
Northamptonshire	1,203	436	587,000	1:358
Northumbria	3,586	1,232	1,433,000	1:297
North Yorkshire	1,408	454	721,000	1:387
Nottinghamshire	2,329	742	1,016,000	1:331
South Yorkshire	3,000	960	1,293,000	1:327
Staffordshire	2,172	736	1,047,000	1:360
Suffolk	1,237	520	662,000	1:377
Surrey	1,674	604	768,000	1:337
Sussex	2,980	971	1,430,000	1:362
Thames Valley	3,833	1,458	1,972,000	1:373
Warwickshire	1,002	332	490,000	1:367
West Mercia	2,060	927	1,099,000	1:368
West Midlands	6,952	2,471	2,619,000	1:278
West Yorkshire	5,070	1,878	2,066,000	1:297
Wiltshire	1,262	490	575,000	1:328
City of London	805	309	4,000	1:4
Metropolitan	27,812	14,584	7,285,000	1:172

[1]Population figures provided by OPCS June 1991.

Racial Attacks

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports have been recorded by the police of racial abuse or racial attacks in south-east London in each year since 1987.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The number of racial incidents recorded for 3 Area of the Metropolitan police, which consists of the London boroughs of Southwark, Lewisham, Bromley, Greenwich and Bexley, is as follows:

Year	Number
1987	244
1988	292
1989	396
1990	394
1991	596
1992	811

Public Order Act

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will propose amendment of the Public Order Act 1986.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend gave to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 31 March at column *225*.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had from the Association of Chief Police Officers concerning the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Department has received one letter from the Association of Chief Police Officers concerning the operation of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of consulting canine experts to determine whether or not dogs at the centre of the Mold Hendre Woods trial are pit bulls.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The cost to the prosecuting authorities of obtaining advice as to the identification of the 29 dogs involved in this case is £2,514·50.

Identity Cards

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a national identity card for all United Kingdom citizens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Although I remain ready to consider any arguments which may be advanced in favour of introducing an identity card system, I am not at present persuaded that the case for such a system has been made.

Child Abuse

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he is making to the recommendations in the NSPCC report into "Joint Enterprise and Parents", relating to *(a)* seeking separate trials in such cases, *(b)* reviewing the guidelines on what constitutes neglect or cruelty for the purposes of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, *(c)* making admissible evidence of behaviour of one parent against a child and *(d)* clarifying the extent to which a trial judge may comment on a defendant's choice not to give evidence.

Mr. Jack: The principal recipient of the NSPCC report into "Joint Enterprise and Parents" was the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which is expected to report in the summer. The Government will very carefully consider any proposals the commission may make that have a bearing on the issues raised in this question. A copy of the report was also sent by the director of the NSPCC to my right hon. and learned Friend, who in his reply offered the view that the report provided a useful analysis of actual cases while clearly demonstrating that there were no easy answers to the problems identified.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *169*, on corporal punishment, if he will list the evidence referred to in his answer.

Mr. Jack: The evidence referred to in that answer is the same evidence which informed policy in 1948.

Boards of Visitors

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has to report on Lord Justice Woolf's recommendations concerning a president of boards of visitors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been considering the report of a working group which was established to look at this recommendation, together with the representations that have been made to me by interested parties.

I have decided against appointing a president of boards of visitors. There is no strong consensus of opinion amongst boards in favour of a president and some concern from them that their local, autonomous and voluntary nature might be compromised by such an appointment. Lord Woolf suggested that a president migh develop more effective methods for recruiting new members to boards and give guidance on good practice to be followed by boards, including the provision of training. These areas are already being addressed by my hon. Friend the Minister of State in conjunction with the board of visitors representative bodies and the prison service liaison section for boards of visitors.

Consequently, I am not convinced that the appointment of a president is required.

Boards of visitors have served the Crown and the public for many years and as Lord Woolf pointed out, we have good cause to be grateful to them for the work they do. The many changes that are happening now within the prison service have resulted in boards of visitors being faced with increasing demands upon their time. With this in mind, I have asked that once the prison service agency has had time to adjust to its own new status, consideration should be given to Lord Woolf's other recommendations and conclusions regarding boards of visitors to see whether we can assist boards further in carrying out their important role.

Directorate of Telecommunications

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for privatising the directorate of telecommunications.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As I announced on 3 February 1993 at column 204, I have been given approval for advisers to be engaged in preparation for the privatisation of DTELS (formerly the Directorate of Telecommunications). The aim is privatise during 1993-94 by means of a trade sale.

Expenses in connection with the sale will be met from sale receipts. Parliamentary approval of this new service will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Home Office's privatisation of DTELS vote (class VIII, vote 5). Pending that approval, urgent expenditure incurred in advance of the sale will be met by repayable advances, not expected to exceed £1 million, from the Contingencies Fund.

Racism and Homophobia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that all police forces monitor racial and homophobic attacks.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* All police forces monitor racial incidents reported to them, and report to HM inspectorate of constabulary each year the number of incidents.

The introduction of systematic monitoring of homophobic attacks is a matter for chief officers.

Life Imprisonment

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time that a prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment spends in prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (table 8.5 of the latest volume, for 1991, Cm 2157), copies of which are in the Library. There are wide variations in time served, as shown by table 8.3 of the same publication.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce new legislation to ease the implementation of further market testing programmes for central Government Departments and agencies in 1993-94.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's legislative programme for 1993-94 will be announced in the Queen's Speech.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimate he has made of the percentage savings arising from market testing in previous years; and if he will give details of evidence he has for the level of savings.

Mr. Waldegrave: Annual returns from Departments indicate that in previous years savings arising from market testing have typically been around 25 per cent. of the original cost even when the activity has remained in-house.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what safeguards exist, under the market testing programme, to prevent contractors or consultants already engaged by a Department from bidding for new work to which they had access or privileged information as a result of their involvement in an earlier contract.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is the responsibility of each Department to assure itself that proper safeguards are in place to preserve fair and open competition and any competitive tendering exercise. Guidance on these matters was set out most recently by Her Majesty's Treasury's public competition and purchasing unit in its guidance note No. 40, "The Competitive Tendering Process", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if it is Government policy for external contractors to be market tested against an in-house bid at the re-tendering stage following a market test in which the initial contract was awarded to an external contractor.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is the Government's general policy not to allow in-house bids when contracted out services are re-tendered. But there may be circumstances when such a bid would be allowed, for example when it could be made as part of a larger in-house bid, in a market test also covering services currently done in-house, or when there appeared to be insufficient external competition.

HEALTH

Sellafield (Emissions)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates her Department have made of the number of people who will die each year *(a)* in Cumbria, *(b)* in the United Kingdom and *(c)* worldwide, as a result of the proposed emissions of krypton gas from Nuclear Fuels Ltd.'s thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield in Cumbria;

(2) what assessment has been made of the additional cost to the health service of treating the additional childhood leukaemias and other cancers due to the emissions of radioactivity from the Sellafield site compared with current, actual emissions.

Mr. Sackville: The estimated collective dose for members of the pubic in the United Kingdom, Europe and worldwide from the proposed emissions of radionuclides, including Krypton 85, from British Nuclear Fuel Ltd's thermal oxide reprocessing plant are tabulated in the authorising Departments' explanatory memorandum to the draft authorisations. Copies of the draft authorisations are available in the Library. Estimates of the theoretical number of fatal cancers can be made using the fatal cancer risk factor recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection, which is currently 0·05 deaths per Sievert. For example, this theoretical calculation would imply, for all radionuclides discharged annually to the atmosphere from these proposed authorisations (covering all plants on the Sellafield site), rather less than one excess death in the United Kingdom over the next few decades. This precludes any sensible quantification of cost.

Tuberculosis

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* cases of and *(b)* deaths from tuberculosis were recorded in each district health authority area in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The number of cases of tuberculosis recorded in each district health authority is not available centrally. The numbers of deaths from tuberculosis will be placed in the Library.

Transitional Grants

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the basis for adjustments, and transfer of funds where appropriate, to transitional grant where boundary changes take place.

Mr. Yeo: We will consider the effects of any significant changes in future years when calculating the distribution of the special transitional grant for those years.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list in rank order the top five providers measured in terms of home help hours per year for those aged over 75 years among social services authorities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available centrally. Figures on hours of home help received by clients of all ages are collected by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and an indicator relating this information to the resident population aged 75 and over by local authority is included in the Personal and Social Services Key Indicators. A copy of the latest publication, for 1990-91, is available in the Library.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact of the annual financial settlement on the level of spending on personal social services in 1993-94.

Mr. Yeo: Total standard spending for local authority personal social services in 1993-94 is £5,585 million, an

increase of 15 per cent. over 1992-93. With effective use of these resources, now almost 35 per cent. in real terms above the 1990-91 level, authorities should be able to make progress expanding existing services and fully discharge their new responsibilities for community care.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the level of provision of magnetic resonance imaging scanners.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 28 April at col. *447*. The latest figures held by the Department indicate that there are 78 magnetic resonance imaging scanners in England.

Patients Charter

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of district health authorities met the patients charter targets for *(a)* assessments following admission to accident and emergency units and *(b)* waiting times in out-patient clinics in the first six months of the financial year.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities, as purchasers of health care, will shortly be publishing their first annual report on performance against all patients charter standards achieved by their providers.

A commentary on overall performance will be included in the chief executive's annual report for 1992-93.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of dispensed drugs are liable to full prescription charges; what proportion are free; and what proportion of the population are liable to pay prescription charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1992, a prescription charge was paid on around 15 per cent. of items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, a further 5 per cent. were covered by prescription prepayment certificates and about 80 per cent. were dispensed free. An estimated 50 per cent. of the population are liable to pay prescription charges.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to monitor the impact of increased prescription charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information we regularly collect does not indicate that the level of prescription charge influences patient access to necessary medication. The number of prescribed items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors rose from 305 million in 1979 to 387 million in 1992, and is expected to exceed 403 million in 1993-94.

Dentistry

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether a rolling capitation system of dental remuneration for treating non-exempt adults is to be introduced;

(2) what will be the role of family health service authorities in the provision of general dental services following consideration of the Bloomfield report on dental remuneration;

(3) what new arrangements for dentistry in the general dental service will be put in place after consideration of the Bloomfield report on dental remuneration;

(4) if she will make it her policy that *(a)* the doctors and dentists pay review should continue to exist under any new service arrangements for dentistry following consideration of the Bloomfield report on dental remuneration and *(b)* the current expenditure on dental services should remain at its present level;

(5) if she will *(a)* ring fence family health services authority funds for general dental services and *(b)* uprate funds in addition to inflation factors.

Dr. Mawhinney: Consultation on the Bloomfield report is continuing. We will announce our proposals in due course.

Community Care

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives of *(a)* the Association of Directors of Social Services, *(b)* the British Association of Social Workers, *(c)* organisations representing those with learning disabilities, *(d)* carers, *(e)* service users, *(f)* the Social Care Association and *(g)* organisations providing residential, drug and alcohol projects to discuss the implementation of the changes in community care and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I most recently met the Association of Directors of Social Services on 26 April 1993.

I met representatives of the British Association of Social Workers on 11 November 1992.

I met the national development team on 7 May 1992, Rescare on 14 May 1992, ARC on 7 July 1992 and Mencap on 27 July 1992.

Ministers have attended a number of functions arranged by carer organisations in recent months. I met the Relatives Association on 11 March 1993.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had several meetings with Age Concern, the most recent of which was on 8 February 1993. I met the National Schizophrenia Fellowship on 10 February 1993. I met the all-party disablement group on 3 November 1992. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the all-party parliamentary group for pensioners on 15 December 1992. We are setting up a group of users and carers who will give Ministers feedback on their experiences of the implementation of the community care reforms.

The Social Care Association has not sought meetings to discuss the implementation of community care.

At the end of last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met a large number of independent sector drug and alcohol service providers to discuss various issues surrounding the implementation of community care.

Ambulances

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in improving ambulance response times; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 23 March at col. *576*.

Nurses

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the level of job opportunities available to newly qualified nurses.

Mr. Sackville: The level of job opportunities available to newly qualified nurses will be for regional health authorities and local employers to decide. Where possible, regional health authorities and local employers are taking a variety of approaches to manage the situation, including expansion of flexible working patterns, job sharing, short-term contracts and clearing house schemes which alert newly qualified nurses to suitable posts.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on hepatitis B vaccination.

Mr. Sackville: In the United Kingdom hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for those at particular risk as a result of occupation, lifestyle or other factors such as intimate contact with a person infected with hepatitis B or a carrier of the disease. High risk groups include:

intravenous drug abusers;
those with multiple sexual partners;
close family contacts of an infected person or carrier;
babies born to mothers who are chronic carriers or who have had acute hepatitis B during pregnancy;
certain occupational groups, including all health care workers involved in invasive procedures.

The policy is kept under constant review, with expert advice from the Advisory Group on Hepatitis and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

"The Health of the Nation"

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress towards "The Health of the Nation" targets.

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" is a long-term strategy, with many of its targets for the year 2000 and beyond. The mechanisms are in place to meet the targets. All national health service regions have implementation plans and a wide range of other bodies are now actively working together to bring about improvements in health.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the regulations to be made under section 30 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 will be laid.

Mr. Sackville: We have today issued a consultation document which includes draft regulations to be known as the Parental Orders for Gamete Donors Regulations 1993. The period for public consultation will end on 2 July 1993. The Government intend to lay the draft regulations before Parliament as soon as possible after the results of the consultation exercise have been considered. Copies of the consultation document are available in the Library.

Tranquilliser Addiction

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued by her Department to general practitioners concerning the treatment of patients with tranquilliser addiction.

Dr. Mawhinney: Detailed advice on the prescribing of benzodiazepines issued by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines is given in the British National Formulary which is issued free to all doctors. This advice contains a withdrawal protocol for general practitioners to help patients reduce their dependency gradually.

NHS Administration

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the numbers of employees in *(a)* administrative grades and *(b)* medical staff employed in the national health service for each of the past seven years, and currently.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table.

Whole-time equivalent administrative and medical staff in England for 30 September of each year

Year	*Administrative and clerical*	*Medical*
1985	110,940	38,900
1986	110,840	39,270
1987	113,900	39,060
1988	114,720	40,390
1989	116,840	41,680
1990	120,040	42,990
1991	127,370	44,210

Sources:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health form KM 49 (1991 figures).

Notes:
1. The figures represent staff directly appointed in the Hospital and Community Health Service. Those for administrative grades are the staff employed on the terms and conditions of the NHS Administrative and Clerical Staffs Whitley Council. Medical staff include those in both career grades and training grades in the Hospital and Community Health Service.
2. The figures for 1991 include staff in NHS trusts.
3. The figures for 1992 are not yet available.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of remuneration paid to chairmen and members of regional and district health authorities and trusts; and what has been the level of remuneration in each case of the past five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The current levels payable since 1 December 1991, of annual remuneration for chairmen and non-executives of NHS authorities and trusts are:

RHA Chairmen: £20,925.

DHA Chairmen are paid according to a banding structure based on the district revenue budget. The present rates are:

Revenue budget 1985-86	*Band*	*Rates per annum (£)*
In excess of £60 million	Band 1	19,285
Between £30 million to £60 million	Band 2	17,145
Less than £30 million	Band 3	15,125

FHSA chairmen are also paid according to a banding structure based on the population of the area covered by the authority. The present rates are:

FHSA population mid 1985	Band	Rates per annum £
Over 750,000	Band 1	12,605
250,000-750,000	Band 2	11,720
Under 250,000	Band 3	10,845

NHS trust chairmen are paid according to the unit turnover in 1988-89. The present rates are:

Unit turnover 1988-89	Band	Rates per annum £
In excess of £50 million	Band 1	19,285
Between £20 million and £50 million	Band 2	17,145
Less than £20 million	Band 3	15,125

Remuneration for non-executive members and directors of NHS authorities and trusts was introduced in 1990. All receive £5,000 per annum.

The remuneration of NHS authority and trust chairmen since July 1987 was:

Date	RHAs £	DHAs £	Trusts £
1 July 1991	19,110	13,812-17,610	13,812-17,610
1 July 1990	18,921	13,674-17,437	—
1 July 1989	12,462	12,462	—
1 July 1988	11,709	11,709	—
1 July 1987	11,205	11,205	—

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate the criteria used in appointing members of health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: Members of health authorities are appointed for their personal qualities and skills, and for the contribution they can make to the authority. The aim is to achieve a balance on the authority of different skills and experience, including local knowledge.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of self-deferrals by people who had been waiting *(a)* 0-11 months, *(b)* 12-23 months or *(c)* 24 or more months for (i) in-patient and for (ii) day case treatment in each six months period since April 1987.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 April 1993]:* Such information as is available is given in the table. Information about self-deferred cases is available only from September 1987. The increase in self-deferrals for day case treatment reflects the 128 per cent. increase in day case admissions over the same period.

Self-deferred cases
Numbers at end of six-month periods ending:

	In-patients	Day case
September 1987	40,766	8,977
March 1988	39,115	8,361
September 1988	40,753	8,433
March 1989	37,098	8,769
September 1989	38,224	9,905
March 1990	36,441	9,735
September 1990	39,274	11,865
March 1991	36,115	11,998
September 1991	33,868	12,469
March 1992	30,965	13,151
September 1992	35,992	18,134

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients waiting more than two years for treatment were removed from waiting lists *(a)* by admission for treatment and *(b)* for reasons other than treatment; and how many were self-deferred, in each regional health authority in each six-month period since September 1988.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 April 1993]:* The information available centrally on the total numbers of patients who were either admitted or removed from waiting lists or self-deferred has been placed in the Library. Information on the numbers of these patients who had waited over two years is not held centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Treaties

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many treaties have been ratified by Her Majesty's Government since 1979.

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty's Government have ratified 243 treaties since 1 January 1979.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the City of London about the proposal to close the accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's hospital.

The Prime Minister: So far as I am aware, none.

Orders in Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the statutory powers which have authorised the use of the Orders in Council in the last six months.

The Prime Minister: Since 1 November 1992, Orders in council have been made under the following Acts and Measures:

Burial Acts 1853 and 1855
Child Abduction and Custody Act 1985
Civil Aviation Acts 1949 and 1982
Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982
Continental Shelf Act 1964
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990
Dioceses Measure 1978
Education Reform Act 1988
Education (Scotland) Act 1980
European Communities Act 1972
Extradition Acts 1870 and 1989
Foreign Compensation Acts 1950 and 1969
Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988
Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978
Local Government Act 1972 and 1974

Maintenance Orders (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act 1972
Merchant Shipping Act 1894
Naval and Marine Pay and Pensions Act 1865
Northern Ireland Act 1974
Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973
Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986
Pastoral Measure 1983
Royal Marriages Act 1772
Social Security Administration Act 1992
Social Security (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1977
Supreme Court Act 1981
Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992
United Nations Act 1964
University of London Act 1978
Universities of Oxford and Cambridge Act 1923
Universities (Scotland) Act 1966

Public Servants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons have been appointed to grades 1 to 7, or equivalent grades, in the civil service since 1979.

The Prime Minister: Since 1979 there has been about 1,250 grade 1 to 3 appointments in the home civil service. This figure includes those appointed from within the service.

About 4,000 recruits have entered the home civil service at grade levels 4 to 7 during the period. This figure excludes promotions from within the civil service, on which information is not readily available.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Ecclesiastical Buildings

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the peculiars enjoying the ecclesiastical exemption from listed building control.

Mr. Brooke: This information is not available. My Department will shortly be discussing the status of peculiars with church representatives, in the light of the changes to the scope of the ecclesiastical exemption which I announced on 17 December at columns *370-71*.

BSkyB

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response he has made to the Independent Producers Association and to the all-party media committee in respect of their submissions concerning the regulatory framework for BSkyB.

Mr. Brooke: The chairman of the all-party media group has recently written to me and I shall be responding shortly. I have not yet received a submission from the Independent Producers Association.

Bernard Shaw Estate

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps have been taken to ensure that the British museum has used the proceeds of the Bernard Shaw estate to fulfil the ends expressed in Mr. Shaw's will.

Mr. Key: The use of income from the bequest is entirely a matter for the trustees of the British Museum.

Deaf and Blind Sports

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what level of direct financial support will be available to the British Deaf Sports Council and British Blind Sport in the coming financial year;

(2) if he will make a statement on Government aid for profoundly deaf people in sport;

(3) what action he will take to assist the British Deaf Sports Council with administrative costs associated with costs arising from participation in the world games for the deaf in Sofia, Bulgaria;

(4) what steps he will take to improve awareness of deaf persons' needs in sport.

Mr. Brooke: In 1993-94, the British Deaf Sports Council and British Blind Sport will each receive a grant of £30,000 from the Sports Council, channelled through the British Sports Association for the Disabled. The Sports Council also assists the British Paralympic Association (BPA) which has agreed to provide £70,000 towards the costs of the World Games for the Deaf and hopes to contribute more. My Department will be represented in Sofia and I am sure that the achievements of our deaf athletes will increase public awareness of this aspect of disabled sport.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Security

Mr. George: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what plans there are to reduce the cost of security at the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Beith: None. All services provided in the Palace are monitored to ensure that best value for money is obtained.

Silverware

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will list the occasions in each of the last five years when cutlery has been sold; what were the scrap weights and the estimated number of items in each consignment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I understand from the Director of Catering Services that the Refreshment Department records show that cutlery and holloware has been sold on three occasions, detailed as follows:

Date	*Scrap weight cwt.*	*Approximate number of items*	*Scrap value per cwt. £*	*Credit received £*
3 May 1991	6·82	2,000	16·00	109
12 February 1992	4·25	500	17·50	74
1 April 1993	1·37	75	25·50	35

The Department's records indicate that damaged and worn out cutlery and holloware were not sold back to its supplier until May 1991. Prior to that time, they were written off by stock-takers, agreed by the National Audit Office as "unusable" and accumulated in the Refreshment Department stores. This accumulated stock was sold in the two lots noted above, dated May 1991 and February 1992,

hence the large number of items disposed of in these transactions. At the financial year-end stock-take in March 1993, approximately 75 items were written off as a result of wear and tear and were sold for scrap in the transaction above dated April 1993.

There is no evidence of any substantial theft of cutlery or holloware from the House.

The Department's conditions of trade now specify that no cutlery or holloware will be disposed of by its supplier unless all identifiable crests and marks have been erased.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will publish the letter from the Director of Catering Services to the hon. Member for Bradford, South dated 27 April, relating to House of Commons silverware.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The terms of the letter are as follows:

"Further to your question tabled for reply on 26 April, I am pleased to write with the details you requested.

The cutlery to which I believe you refer was damaged as a result of normal wear and tear and was disposed of by sale as scrap to the Department's nominated silverware supplier. In fact two small consignments of redundant silverware have been disposed of in this manner in the past six months. The total scrap value paid to the Department was £109, based on the weight of the redundant silverware.

In November 1992, it was brought to our attention by *The Sunday Times* that House of Commons silverware was being offered for sale in the USA. It transpired that a consignment of redundant silverware sold back to our supplier in the normal way had been sold on by them for melting down by a third party without having first erased all Portcullis badging. The silverware was then sold on by the third party and eventually appeared for sale on the open market in the USA. Rest assured, contractual agreement has since been formalised that no old silverware will be disposed of by our supplier unless all identifiable crests and marks have been erased.

I trust this information is helpful to you, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any points you would like to raise on the matter."

I understand from the Director of Catering Services that there was an error in the letter. The two consignments of silverware mentioned in the second paragraph of the letter were in fact disposed of in February 1992 and April 1993.

Committee Stages

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list each Bill, since 1979, whose Committee stage exceeded the hours spent overall on the Committee stage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill in Session 1992-93; and in respect of which of those Bills the House made allocation of time orders.

Mr. Newton: Since Session 1979-80, no Bill which was committed to a Committee of the whole House has had a Committee stage as long as that of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. Comparative figures for Bills committed to Standing Committees are only available at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION

Ministerial Visits to Schools

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many of the schools *(a)* he and *(b)* the three schools Ministers have visited in the past year are (i) grant maintained, (ii) local authority run and (iii) private.

Mr. Forth: Of the 117 schools visited by the DFE ministerial team my right hon. Friend has visited three grant-maintained schools, 25 local authority maintained schools, two non-maintained special schools, five independent schools and two city technology colleges.

I, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) have between us visited 13 grant-maintained schools, 55 local authority maintained schools, one non-maintained special school, seven independent schools and four city technology colleges.

Postgraduate Students

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to assist postgraduate students to fund their course fees and living expenses where their education authority are refusing to grant discretionary awards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Local education authorities have power to make discretionary awards to students on postgraduate courses, other than those designated under the Postgraduate etc. Courses (Exclusion from Discretionary Awards) Regulations as being within the ambit of another postgraduate award-making body. Universities can use their access funds to help full-time postgraduate students facing financial difficulties. My right hon. Friend has no plans to establish a new award scheme for postgraduates unable to secure support from other sources.

Advertisements

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the newspapers and other journals in which he placed advertisements on 27 April; and what was the cost to his Department in each case.

Mr. Forth: Advertisements were placed in *The Independent* and *The Guardian*. The rates for placing advertisements are negotiated on an individual basis and this information is commercial in confidence.

Tests

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will list the local education authorities which in the seven years before the introduction of assessment and testing within the national curriculum failed to ensure that children in their schools were assessed and tested until they took examinations at 16-plus;

(2) if he will list the schools in each local education authority area, which in the seven years before the introduction of assessment and testing within the national curriculum failed to ensure that children were assessed and tested until they took public examinations at 16-plus;

(3) if he will list the action taken by his predecessors and himself since 1979 to remedy the failures reported to them as far as the non-testing of children before the age of 16-plus was concerned.

Mr. Forth: Comprehensive information on testing and assessment policies in individual local education authorities and individual schools is not available in the form requested. There have been a number of surveys of tests used for different age groups, however. The most recent was conducted by the National Foundation for

Educational Research on behalf of the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) in March 1992 on existing practices in local education authorities for testing 11-year-olds. No testing took place in 49 out of the 91 authorities which responded—over half.

The same theme is to be found in a number of reports by Her Majesty's inspectorate. For example, in OFSTED's most recent report, "Assessment, Recording and Reporting in 1991-92", the schools inspectors said that they had found that

"The quality of teacher assessment during key stage 3 remained variable with the norm being weak"

and

"the quality of teacher assessment in middle schools was rarely good."

The main action to remedy this was taken by my right hon. Friend and his predecessors when the national curriculum and its associated assessment arrangements were introduced in the Education Reform Act 1988, to ensure that all pupils were rigorously assessed in the national curriculum subjects four times during 11 years of compulsory schooling, on completion of programmes of study associated with each key stage—for most pupils at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. Implementation of statutory assessment procedures began with tests for seven-year-olds in 1991. Tests for 11-year-olds will be the last to be introduced, in 1994.

Special Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress has been made to reduce the time taken by local education authorities in issuing statements of special needs; and which local education authorities have met his Department's recommended time of issuing special needs statements.

Mr. Forth: The information requested has not to date been collected centrally. However the Government recognise that there has been concern over the time some LEAs can take to complete their statutory duties in this area. The Education Bill, now in the other place, accordingly empowers the Secretary of State to make regulations prescribing time limits for the making of assessments and statements, subject to prescribed exceptions.

Parents' Guide

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will name the advertising agency handling the campaign to publicise the parents' guide, "How is Your Child doing at School?" and what is the fee for this account.

Mr. Forth: The advertising agency is GGK London Ltd. Information about the agency's handling fee is commercial in confidence.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated cost of the free phone line set up for parents to request copies of "How is Your Child Doing at School?".

Mr. Forth: The cost of setting up the free phone line is estimated at £3,500. The cost of operating the line will depend on the response rate.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he placed the order for the parent's guide "How is Your Child Doing at School?"; and how many copies of the leaflet have been published in each of the 10 languages listed in the advertisement published on 27 April.

Mr. Forth: Proposals for a campaign to provide parents with information about testing, based on similar campaigns undertaken in the previous two years, formed part of the Department's publicity strategy approved by the Secretary of State in December last year. The number of copies being produced in each language is:

	Number
English	3,000,000
Hindi	10,000
Bengali	10,000
Punjabi	10,000
Gujerati	10,000
Chinese	10,000
Greek	10,000
Turkish	10,000
Urdu	12,000
Vietnamese	7,500

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much it cost his Department to publish the parent's guide "How is Your Child Doing at School?" in each of the 10 languages listed in the advertisement published on 27 April.

Mr. Forth: The cost of producing the guide in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujerati, Chinese, Greek, Turkish and Vietnamese is estimated at £18,000 in total. It is not possible to allocate a cost for each individual translation. The cost of producing the version in English is estimated at £132,000.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for future DOE leaflets for parents.

Mr. Forth: During the current year, my right hon. Friend proposes to issue the following leaflets whose primary target audience is parents:

- a revised version of the parents charter;
- the 1993 comparative tables of schools' performance;
- a leaflet about the assisted places scheme;
- a leaflet, "Questions Parents Ask", about self-governing (GM) schools; and
- a leaflet about GNVQs.

University Students' Grants

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average annual grant for university students in each European Community country.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not held centrally. The table shows the latest available estimates for the expenditure per student on student support and welfare in higher education. A fuller set of comparisons for 1986 is given in the DFE working report "International Comparisons of Higher Education"; copies of which are available in the Library.

Public recurrent expenditure on student support and welfare per higher education student in 1989 at 1989 prices

Type of support available	£
France	
Loan and grant	248
Germany	
Loan and grant	62

Type of support available	[1]£
Spain	
Loan and grant	112
United Kingdom	
Loan and grant	[2,3]785

[1] At purchasing power parity.
[2] Excluding expenditure and students on nursing and paramedic courses at Department of Health establishments. Also excludes in-service teacher training secondments and costs.
[3] Excludes tuition fees.

Dance Students

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what level of financial support is available for students studying dance; and if he will make a statement on the availability of courses in dance and future financial support for dance students.

Mr. Boswell: Students on designated full-time first degree and equivalent level courses in dance are eligible for a mandatory award and a student loan on the terms prescribed in the regulations. Other students may apply to their local education authority for a discretionary award, the availability and amount of which is for the authority to determine. Some dance students also receive support under the Government's music and ballet scheme. The Government keep these arrangements under periodic review.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Kent Marshes

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what role the flood defence function of the National Rivers Authority has in the implementation of higher water levels in the north Kent marshes environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Curry: Where higher water levels are sought there will be careful liaison between the Ministry and the National Rivers Authority.

Meat Regulations

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the implementation of EC directives on slaughterhouses *(a)* in general and *(b)* in regard to the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992 and the requirement for stainless steel hooks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 29 April at col. 1136, and to the independent report on hygiene and structural requirements in slaughterhouses which my right hon. Friend the Minister placed in the Library of the House on 31 March (*Official Report*, 31 March 1993, col. *251*).

Pesticides

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of progress in the speeding up of pesticide registration and evaluation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Good progress is being made by the Pesticides Safety Directorate in speeding up the pesticide evaluation system. Applications for new active ingredients are now being evaluated shortly after receipt of the full data package and the target is to clear 15 such applications in the current year. This is a substantial increase on previous years. Queues have also been eliminated in three other approval streams covering experimental permits and minor changes to existing approvals. The waiting period for applications requiring the evaluation of new data in respect of existing products had been reduced from a peak of 91 weeks to 67 weeks. I expect this period to be reduced significantly over the next few months.

Table Salt

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has plans to ban the use of sodium hexacyanoferrate as an additive in table salt.

Mr. Soames: I have no plans to ban the use of this additive. Sodium hexacyanoferrate is permitted by the Miscellaneous Additives in Food Regulations (as amended). It was last evaluated by the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) as an anti-caking agent in salt in 1988. The COT confirmed that sodium hexacyanoferrate was provisionally acceptable for use in food pending the submission of further studies. These studies have now been carried out and will be reviewed by the COT when full details have been submitted.

Radioactive Fallout

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep and farms, covering what land area in total, are still affected by the restrictions imposed on farms as a result of the radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl nuclear accident in May 1986.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of farms	*Acreage (approx)*	*Number of sheep (approx)*
England	126	90,588	110,500
Northern Ireland	98	18,742	17,750
Scotland	54	137,579	106,000
Wales	353	180,000	248,000

Dairy Herds (Bacteria)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how often the Milk Marketing Board performs a bacteria count and cell count on every dairy herd.

Mr. Curry: The Milk Marketing Board aims to test the milk supplied to it by each producer once a week.

IACS Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will extend the deadline for the submission of integrated administration and control system forms for one month from 5 May.

Mr. Curry: No.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about his Department's approach to those who return their IACS forms with *(a)* minor and *(b)* major errors.

Mr. Curry: We are carrying out an initial brief check of IACS forms received to ensure that essential details have been provided and the application has been signed. Applications which satisfy this test are accepted as having been lodged with the Department on the date of receipt. Other applications are returned to farmers for completion or signature, and will be lodged on the date we received the completed or signed form. We cannot, however, guarantee to check all applications in time for them to be completed before the deadline, and it is for farmers to ensure that they have supplied all the necessary information. All applications will subsequently be subjected to more detailed checks of the information provided. The penalties to be applied where IACS forms are late or inaccurate are laid down by EC regulations. Details are set out in the IACS explanatory booklet, together with the procedures for the correction of genuine errors. We shall be as reasonable as we possibly can in our checks of applications received, particularly where minor errors are involved, but we have to operate within the legislative framework.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what penalties he is proposing for those who return IACS forms late; what is the return date for IACS forms in every other EC country; and what are the penalties for late submission in every other EC country.

Mr. Curry: The penalties for late claims are laid down in EC regulations, and apply equally in all EC member states. Details are set out in the IACS explanatory booklet.

The EC regulations set a deadline of 15 May for the return of IACS applications this year. I understand that the majority of member states have opted for a deadline on or around 15 May, though Spain set a closing date of 31 March and France a date of 30 April. Portugal has set 30 April for farmers with autumn and winter crops and 15 May for the others. There is provision in the EC regulations for member states to set a deadline between 15 May and 1 July where the application relates only to permanent pasture and it is submitted at the same time as a livestock aid application. I understand that only Ireland has exercised this option.

Dairy Inspectors

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dairy inspectors there are in the United Kingdom; how often dairy inspectors visit each farm to administer the dairy regulations; what is the cost to the farmer of each visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: There are 21 dairy inspectors in England and Wales. The frequency of inspection visits varies but top quality milk producers whose milk is consistently placed in Band A of the Milk Marketing Board's total bacterial count scheme, who have a good history of compliance with milk and dairy regulations and who demonstrated satisfactory on-farm conditions during the most recent visits, will normally be visited every three and a half years. Other producers are visited more frequently depending on the standards they achieve. The present cost to the farmer of each visit is £92, or £71 if he has fewer than 20 cows. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the respective Secretaries of State.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those EC countries operating restrictions on specified offals.

Mr. Soames: According to information collected by the European Commission in April 1991, in addition to the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands have a ban on the feeding of specified bovine offals to ruminants.

The export of the specified bovine offals from the United Kingdom to other member states is prohibited.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those EC countries that have recorded incidences of BSE.

Mr. Soames: In addition to the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and France have confirmed cases of BSE in indigenous cattle, and there has been a single case of BSE in Denmark in a cow which had been imported from the United Kingdom.

Captive Birds

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decision he has taken in relation to resuming imports of captive birds from Tanzania.

Mr. Soames: The issue of licences for import of captive birds from Tanzania was suspended in March 1991 because of the failure of the authorities there to respond to our request for a veterinary official of my Department to make a visit and discuss with them various animal health and welfare matters, the standard of health certification and the conditions under which future imports of captive birds would take place.

The Tanzanian veterinary authorities agreed to a visit from a senior MAFF veterinarian in July 1991. Following this visit a new protocol for the provision of animal health certification was subsequently drawn up. The main provision of the new protocol is that the director of veterinary services in Tanzania will be responsible for the production and issue of an official veterinary health certificate, which will be required for all birds entering Great Britain, regardless of their final destination.

I have now received assurances from the Tanzanian veterinary authorities that they will observe the new protocol on exports of all birds to Great Britain, regardless of their final destination. Arrangements are also in hand for verification of the certifying veterinarians.

In view of these assurances, I have agreed to the immediate resumption of the issue of licences for imports of captive birds from Tanzania.

We shall be monitoring closely at ports of entry any consignments of birds arriving from Tanzania in the

coming months to ensure that the terms of the protocol have been met. The lifting of the moratorium will not affect the requirement for CITES export permits originating in Tanzania for bird species covered by the convention to be checked for validity by the CITES Secretariat in Lausanne before an import permit can be issued by the Department of the Environment.

We remain committed to securing reductions in the level of mortality in imported captive birds, both whilst in transit to this country and while in post-import quarantine. In addition, we will continue to take appropriate measures to ensure that the highest possible standards are complied with by those transporting birds and those responsible for their care after import.

Animal Breeding Techniques

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he intends to respond to ethical concerns about the use of new animal breeding techniques on farms.

Mr. Gummer: Ethical concerns about the use of new animal breeding techniques in farming are matters which I take very seriously. I have therefore invited Dr. Michael Banner, Dean of Peterhouse college, Cambridge to chair an ad hoc committee to consider the ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals. The committee's terms of reference are:

> To consider the ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals; to advise on the adequacy of the existing legal and other safeguards in those areas; and to make recommendations.

I shall discuss the membership and work programme of the committee with Dr. Banner, and will make a further announcement as soon as these issues have been settled. I expect the committee to report in about a year.

Meat Products

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the degree of over-capacity in the United Kingdom meat foods manufacturing sector.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Overall capacity of the food industry is for the market place to decide. My contacts with representatives of this sector suggest that they are continuing to invest and are optimistic about the future.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Radar Speed Cameras

Ms Walley: to ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to ban the sale and advertising of devices to evade radar speed camera technology.

Mr. Leigh: The use and advertising of such devices is already subject to a number of controls.

The use of radar speed trap detectors constitutes an offence under the Wireless Telegraph Act 1949.

Under the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 it is an offence to obscure the registration number of a vehicle. It is a common law offence to incite a person to commit an offence, for example, in an advertisement.

The British code of advertising practice, administered by the Advertising Standards Authority requires that advertisements should contain nothing which is in breach of the law.

I understand that the Department of Transport is to strengthen existing regulations to make it illegal to sell reflective number plates of the type designed to evade camera technology.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been loaned by each of the participating banks in the loan guarantee scheme in the prior two years.

Mr. Leigh: Money loaned, by lender, under the small firms loan guarantee scheme in the past two years has been:

£ thousands

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*Total*
National Westminster	34,600	13,672	48,272
Barclays	14,060	13,281	27,341
Midland	8,770	14,029	22,799
3i	4,950	4,220	9,170
Bank of Scotland	2,710	2,127	4,837
Lloyds	2,300	2,306	4,606
LENTA	1,620	13	1,633
Royal Bank of Scotland	990	569	1,559
Clydesdale	—	1,197	1,197
Ulster	—	229	229
Yorkshire Enterprise	—	225	225
DONBAC	—	218	218
Northern	—	190	190

Power Stations (Sour Gas)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which power stations in the United Kingdom have been authorised to use sour gas.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has given consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to the following stations which are to be fuelled by "sour gas":

Ryedale, North Yorkshire (50-60 MW)
Connah's Quay, Deeside, North Wales (1,350 MW)

Power stations with a capacity of 50 MW or less are dealt with under the Town and Country Planning Acts and my Department does not have information on such stations.

Consents for power stations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce his decision in respect of Nuclear Electric's application to set up an incinerator to dispose of contaminated oil at Trawsfynydd power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will announce his decision on this application in due course.

Motor Insurance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the role of his Department in ensuring that only motor insurance companies with current valid authorisation can issue insurance cover; what steps are taken to protect policy holders where there is no valid authorisation; if he will list all recent cases of companies issuing cover without authorisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department has responsibilities for administering the Insurance Companies Act 1982. Part of this responsibility is to ensure that only properly authorised companies underwrite motor insurance business in the United Kingdom. When the Department becomes aware of possible illegal underwriting of motor insurance business it will therefore seek to act to have any illegality stopped. Depending on the circumstances of a particular case action by the Department against those who may be in breach of the Act might include investigation, prosecution and seeking a winding up; and if fraud is suspected, referral and/or assistance to the police. Where appropriate, it would also seek to alert the public to the dangers of an illegal operation through appropriate publicity and would liaise with other bodies e.g. the Department of Transport, that may need to be aware of a case or may be able to help with it.

It is the responsibility of drivers to make certain that they are properly insured. They can help themselves by dealing through reputable intermediaries or direct with authorised insurance companies. They should always ensure that they know the name of the insurer carrying their risk as well as the name of any intermediary with whom they deal. If they have doubts about the status of the insurer, they may contact the Motor Insurers Bureau for advice or, failing that, ask the Department. In the event that an uninsured motorist is involved in an accident the Motor Insurers Bureau will meet a third party claim but may pursue the uninsured motorist for recompense.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of illegal motor insurance operations coming to the attention of the Department. The list gives the names of those who over the last three months are believed to have issued motor insurance without proper underwriting by an authorised insurer. In addition, a further four cases are currently being investigated to establish whether the issuers of the insurance are acting legally. Many of these cases have involved targeting particular groups of motorists who have been affected by rises in insurance premiums. For example, young drivers and those with convictions may be attracted by the unusually attractive rates offered.

Those running illegal operations will usually advertise their products in a very limited way. Thus advertising may be restricted to particular local areas or limited to distribution of leaflets to domestic premises. By these means they seek to minimise risk of detection. Such approaches should be treated with some caution. As with all fraudulent activity, it is the responsibility of those paying money to take reasonable precautions against being duped.

RECENT CASES OF COMPANIES ISSUING MOTOR INSURANCE WITHOUT AUTHORISATION

February 1993
Westbridge Corporation Ltd.
72 New Bond Street
London
trading through Red Rose Insurance Consultants in Bolton

March 1993
Royal Lytham Insurance/Royal Lytham Holdings
Lytham St. Annes
Sunrise Insurance Co. (UK) Ltd./L & G Security Ltd.
Neath
Crest Motor Securities (UK), trading as Springwood Insurance Services
Ipswich

April 1993
Sterling Motor Securities UK Ltd./Sterling Union Assurance
72 New Bond Street
London
trading through Nationwide Insurance Bureau Ltd
Westbridge Corporation Ltd.
72 New Bond Street
London
trading through Paul Rogers Insurance & Financial Consultants in Hove

Jordan (Exports)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total number of export licences awarded by his Export Control Office for equipment sent to Jordan since 1985; and what information Her Majesty's Government have received on compliance with end-use certificates of goods exported to Jordan over this period.

Mr. Needham: A complete breakdown of figures for the number of licences issued for Jordan is not readily available. However, the following table shows applications received and licences issued where available:

Year	*Applications received*	*Licences issued*
1985	n/a	n/a
1986	200	n/a
1987	340	n/a
1988	310	n/a
1989	138	n/a
1990	155	47
1991	104	69
1992	157	122
[1]1993	39	13

[1] 1 January 1993 to 30 April 1993.

Information on compliance with end-use certificates is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Export Guarantee Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the £1 billion fund created in 1988 under section 2 of the Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment Act 1978 has been used.

Mr. Needham: ECGD has issued guarantees worth £834·2 million against the ceiling of £1 billion under the arrangements which Ministers announced in June 1988 for underwriting large contracts for defence goods.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the outstanding liabilities, and the annual cost, of expenditure incurred under section 2 of the Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment Act 1978 in each year since 1979.

Mr. Needham: Information on section 2 is only available up to March 1987 after which ECGD introduced

a new form of account under which information was no longer accounted for separately between section 1 and section 2.

The information has been published in ECGD's trading accounts from 1979-80, copies of which can be found in the Library. For convenience the relevant details are brought together in the following table:

	Amounts at risk[1] *£ million*	*Amounts in default*[2] *£ million*	*Consolidated fund balance*[3] *£ million*	*Trading reserves and surpluses*[4] *£ million*
31 March 1980	8,177	77	342·0	309·3
31 March 1981	8,465	94	371·3	364·5
31 March 1982	12,266	180	380·6	454·6
31 March 1983	17,737	403	166·0	680·3
31 March 1984	18,673	623	−15·5	566·3
31 March 1985	19,354	876	−156·7	405·3
31 March 1986	16,930	1,200	−252·8	551·0
31 March 1987	14,821	1,549	−510·0	297·2

[1] These amounts represent ECGD's gross contingent liability under extant guarantees excluding unrecovered claims payments.
[2] These comprise gross paid claims, plus interest, which have not been recovered or written off.
[3] These amounts represent ECGD's cumulative cash balance under Section 2. Notional interest in line with commercial rates was earned on positive balances and charged on negative balances.
[4] These amounts represent the cumulative value of ECGD's assets (positive cash balances, paid claims net of provisions) over its liabilities (negative cash balances, provisions for future claims).

Mothballed Collieries

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if collieries which are to be mothballed will have their shafts, roadways, and coal faces maintained; if water pumping operations will be maintained at collieries where this is necessary; and if he will give details of what the mothballing process consists of.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Coal.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what permits, licences or grants have been given by the nuclear installations inspectorate/Health and Safety Executive, in the recent and current rounds of the licensing procedure for THORP, for radioactive processes and/or the use of radioactive substances in THORP, other than the reception and storage of irradiated fuel.

Mr. Eggar: The regulation of THORP, which is undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate (NII), is effected by conditions attached to the nuclear site licence for Sellafield. As regards the commissioning of THORP the NII has not yet permitted the introduction of radioactive material except for small amounts of natural uranium needed to calibrate certain instruments.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account has been taken of *(a)* the Tomsk-7 and *(b)* the 1973 B204 Sellafield accidents in the design of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* This is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) but I understand that all relevant factors, including lessons learned from the accident at B 204 Sellafield, have been taken fully into account by BNFL in the design and construction of THORP. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate ensures that the design of nuclear plant such as THORP meets the high standards of safety they require.

Metric and Imperial Measures

Mr. Alexander: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will enable consumers to compare the price of metric and imperial measured catch-weight goods by waiving the statutory requirement to show dead-weight marking on them so that display of comparison weight can be made by means of charts at the premises.

Mr. Leigh: The Government are reviewing the present statutory requirement for dual price marking.

Postal Deliveries

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has, in his plans for the universal letter service at a uniform tariff following the Post Office review, for the provision of a second daily domestic delivery in most areas of the country.

Mr. Leigh: There are no plans to change the overall arrangements.

Coal Stocks

Mr. Churchill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the average level of coal stocks held *(a)* by British Coal and *(b)* by the generators in each of the past five years; and what guidance he is giving each in respect of stock levels in the current and two subsequent years.

Mr. Eggar: The average levels of coal stocks held by the electricity generators and British Coal in each of the last five years were:

	British Coal *(thousand tonnes)*	*United Kingdom electricity generators* *(thousand tonnes)*
1988	6,105	25,813
1989	9,851	27,975
1990	8,593	26,895
1991	9,827	28,942
1992	12,632	31,989

The current stocking requirements are set out in the Government's White Paper, "The Prospects for Coal"

(Cmnd 2235). As envisaged in the White Paper, consultations are taking place about stocking arrangements for 1993-94 and following years.

Oil Exploration

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specific conditions have been imposed on oil exploration licences issued to Marathon Oil for blocks 103/1, 103/6, 106/27, 102/10, 106/18, 106/19 and 106/23.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *304*.

Energy and Environment Council

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the issues discussed and decisions taken at the joint Energy and Environment Council held on 23 April.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside and I represented the United Kingdom at a joint session of the Energy and Environment Councils on 23 April to review progress in relation to the Community strategy on climate change. Discussion focused on the proposal for a Community carbon/energy tax and the concept of burden-sharing in achieving the carbon dioxide stabilisation objective. We noted that the Economic and Financial Council had concluded last December that a great deal more work was needed before it could take any decisions on whether a tax was needed and, if so, what form it should take. This work was under way and, in the meantime, it was premature to seek to commit member states to the principle of a Community-wide carbon/energy tax. The United Kingdom was not yet convinced that such a tax was either a necessary or appropriate response to the problem of global warming. A number of other member states who were willing to accept the principle of a Community tax made clear that they could do so only on the basis that they would be exempted from applying the tax as part of the proposed burden-sharing arrangement. No decisions were taken or agreement reached, on the proposed tax or on the structure of burden-sharing.

The Council also discussed a Commission report on Community assistance to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to improve the safety of nuclear reactors, in which the United Kingdom and others called for improved implementation of Community programmes.

The Commission announced that it would shortly submit proposals for a new Council regulation on ozone-depleting substances.

British Coal Pension Scheme

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department has given or offered an indemnity to British Coal against any liability that might fall upon the corporation as a consequence of the deferment of payments of additional contributions to the British Coal staff superannuation scheme.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* No indemnity has been given or offered to British Coal for any such liabilities.

Waste Disposal Contracts

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *306*, if a municipal waste-to-energy scheme which had been granted a waste disposal contract relatively soon after a third tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation is announced would be eligible to bid into the new order.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Provided that such a project met the other requirements, I would expect it to be eligible to bid.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a further statement on progress made by AEA Technology at the Dounreay nuclear establishment to secure the import of spent research reactor nuclear fuel from Iraq.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The IAEA issued a formal invitation, on 27 November 1992, to tender for the removal, transport and disposal of irradiated fuel stored in Iraq. No tender was submitted by the United Kingdom nuclear industry.

Innovation Schemes

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will provide information on the take up of each of the *(a)* Smart, *(b)* Spur, *(c)* advanced technology programmes, *(d)* Link and *(e)* Eureka innovation schemes;

(2) if he will outline the expenditure, in constant prices, on each of the *(a)* Link, *(b)* advanced technology programmes, *(c)* Smart, *(d)* Spur amd *(e)* Eureka schemes.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* Information on take-up of the schemes listed is represented by the number of projects for which offers were accepted. Information on expenditure is presented in 1992-93 prices.

Number of offers accepted

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Advanced technology programmes	15	89	58	73	34
EUREKA	19	10	21	69	55
LINK	13	38	90	110	109
SMART	130	215	258	278	272
SPUR	0	0	1	137	128
Total	177	352	428	667	598

Expenditure in constant 1992-93 prices (£k)

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Advanced technology programmes	10,434	10,407	12,992	20,942	28,821
EUREKA	6,200	6,713	10,599	12,116	22,736
LINK	74	1,508	4,472	9,969	15,483
SMART	3,206	6,533	10,120	12,140	12,113
SPUR	0	0	7	329	5,856
Total	19,914	25,161	38,190	55,496	85,009

Regional Development Funding

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the level of European regional development funding in each region in each year since 1984 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1984 prices.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* European regional development fund allocations, in current and 1984 prices, to each of the regions of the United Kingdom are given in the tables:

European regional development fund allocations to the United Kingdom

£ million, 1984 prices

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
North	39	24	35	55	58	45	6	28	49
Yorkshire and Humberside	51	20	36	27	16	19	35	35	42
East Midlands	4	17	2	2	3	0	5	5	16
South West	28	10	20	25	15	4	4	3	8
West Midlands	18	44	36	58	21	0	87	22	31
North West	57	70	42	33	30	39	0	41	27
South East	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
ENGLAND	197	185	171	199	143	107	137	135	173

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
WALES	57	54	40	49	52	50	10	36	56
SCOTLAND	92	66	49	101	79	37	86	88	35
Multi Regional	1	0	12	2	1	10	0	0	8
GREAT BRITAIN	346	304	272	352	275	204	233	260	272
NORTHERN IRELAND	21	22	36	35	36	69	20	41	60
TOTAL UNITED KINGDOM	367	326	308	386	311	273	253	301	332

European regional development fund allocations to the United Kingdom

£ million, current prices

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
North	39	25	39	63	70	57	8	39	72
Yorkshire and Humberside	51	21	40	31	19	24	45	48	61
East Midlands	4	18	2	3	3	0	6	7	23
South West	28	10	22	28	18	5	5	4	12
West Midlands	18	46	40	67	26	0	113	30	45
North West	57	74	47	38	36	49	0	56	40
South East	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
ENGLAND	197	195	190	230	172	134	179	184	252
WALES	57	57	45	56	63	63	13	50	81
SCOTLAND	92	69	54	117	94	46	112	120	51
Multi Regional	1	0	13	3	1	13	0	0	12
GREAT BRITAIN	346	321	302	406	330	256	304	355	395
NORTHERN IRELAND	21	23	40	40	43	87	26	56	87
TOTAL UNITED KINGDOM	367	344	342	446	373	343	330	410	482

"The Abuse of Market Power"

Mr. Dewar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all the individuals and bodies from which his Department received written or oral representation in connection with the Green Paper, "The Abuse of Market Power".

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the summary of responses to the Green Paper which was placed in the Vote Office when I announced to the House on 14 April the Government's decision to strengthen the existing legislation on abuse of market power. An appendix to the summary lists those who made representations on the Green Paper.

WALES

Fords

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many fords there are in Wales where public roads cross watercourses; how many fatal or serious accidents have occurred in each of the last 10 years as a result of vehicles failing to negotiate water on fords on public roads; if he will list fords which have been closed to traffic following such accidents; and what is his Department's policy towards fords and the provision of warning to motorists when water conditions may be dangerous.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are no fords crossing trunk roads in Wales. Information on local authority roads is not held centrally. There are warning signs prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981 which local authorities can use to alert drivers to the existence of a ford and to the depth of water.

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the town-village regeneration schemes that have been undertaken under the valleys initiative to date, indicating the amount spent by his Department on each scheme; and if he will list forthcoming town-village centre regeneration schemes to be funded under the valleys initiative in the forthcoming year.

Mr. David Hunt: The table shows the urban development schemes which have been and will be funded by the Welsh Development Agency in the period from 1988 to 1994:

Welsh development agency urban development: programme for the valleys
Indicative expenditure 1988-89 to 1993-94

£000s

Town/Project	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Merthyr Tydfil	260	—	500	1,220	2,100	3,210
Cynon Valley	—	100	400	990	2,600	3,030
Abertillery	100	150	200	560	720	500
Ebbw Vale	—	70	—	155	200	300
Tredegar	—	—	—	—	350	1,795
Pontarddulais	50	—	565	435	540	150
Pontardawe	—	80	360	340	220	600
Ystalyfera	—	50	200	250	500	250
Neath/Dulais	100	100	—	100	—	—
Rhondda	—	240	190	340	500	800
Pontypridd	80	210	110	180	200	800
South Islwyn	—	120	175	280	90	500
Caerphilly/Abertridwr	—	—	200	150	350	150
Amman Valley Ammanford	—	50	186	—	—	200
Rhymney	40	80	—	—	—	—
Pontypool	—	—	—	—	50	680
Torfaen	—	300	—	125	300	—

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the environmental improvement schemes undertaken as part of the valleys initiative in each year from 1990; and if he will list forthcoming environmental schemes to be developed under the initiative in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994.

Mr. David Hunt: Under the programme for the valleys the Welsh Deveiopment Agency has supported 134 environmental improvement schemes since 1990.

Projects have included:	£
Garden Festival Approaches	383,000
Dowlais Top landscape works (Part of WDA/Welsh Office heads of valleys corridor project)	114,000
Landscape Works: Rassau and Garnlydan Housing Estate Blaenau Gwent	76,000
Landscape Works: Cefn Golau Housing Estate	17,000
Taff Trail long distance cycleway	95,000
Taff Valley Coed Cymru initiative	18,000
Alltwen Triangle landscaping	20,000
Brynamen Road landscaping Gwaun Cae Gurwen	25,000
Seven Sisters town centre improvements	48,000
Resolven town centre improvements	68,000
Resolven canal basin	50,000

In addition many environmental improvement projects have been supported by the urban programme and by groundwork trusts. It would not be possible to list every individual scheme other than at disproportionate cost.

Future Development

The WDA will be promoting a number of landscape and forest strategies in the valleys programme area. Four areas have so far been identified, namely:

Blaenau Gwent, Rhymney, Rhondda and Ogwr.

In each case there will be a package of action based on a landscape masterplan including the planting of new woodlands, management of existing woodlands, the upgrading of land reclamation sites, and a range of amenity creation and landscape projects in the urban fringe. These will be achieved in partnerships which will include local authorities, the Forest Authority and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Drugs and Alcohol

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has issued to local councils in relation to their responsibilities for drug and alcohol misusers under the community care arrangement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Advice was issued to Welsh county councils on 1 April 1993 in Welsh Office circular WHC(93)30, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. This advice covers the councils' responsibilities to assess the needs of alcohol and drugs misusers and to plan and arrange appropriate services for these individuals under the general community care arrangements. It includes reference to residential care arrangements.

Income Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the poorest 10 per cent. of the population of Wales were *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* families with children and *(c)* single people with children in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the estimated real income after housing costs of *(a)* the richest 10 per cent. of the population of Wales and *(b)* the poorest 10 per cent. in each year since 1979 and what was the average real income in Wales in each year since 1979;

(2) what estimates he has of the number of households in Wales that currently have debts owing to three or more creditors and what was the number in *(a)* 1981 *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available centrally.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current state of the outstanding caseload for the local government ombudsman in Wales for cases waiting *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months and *(c)* nine months or longer to be investigated.

Mr. David Hunt: The Commission for Local Administration is an independent statutory body and questions relating to its activities are for the Commission itself to answer.

The annual reports of the Local Commissioner, copies of which are in the Library of the House, provide statistics on the number of complaints received and the time taken to deal with them. The report for 1992-93 is likely to be available in June.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received to date in support of the local Government reform proposals set out for Dwyfor; and if he will indicate the number of representations received that were in favour of granting independent unitary authority status for *(a)* Meirionnydd and *(b)* Montgomery.

Mr. David Hunt: Since publishing my White Paper on 1 March 1993, I have received one written representation in support of a Caernarfonshire and Meirionnyddshire unitary authority. In addition, I have received 10 representations in favour of a Meirionnydd unitary authority and 181 representations in favour of a Montgomeryshire unitary authority. I have also received 4,135 signed postcards in favour of unitary authority status for Montgomeryshire.

Bypass Schemes

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the estimated cost of the proposed Builth Wells bypass, the estimated number of vehicles per day that will use it, the estimated timescale for completion, the length of delays currently experienced by drivers and the present level of accidents in Builth Wells.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The estimated cost of the Builth Wells bypass is £15 million (at out-turn prices). Depending on which route is chosen, some 6,500 vehicles a day could use the new road. The anticipated two year construction contract is currently programmed to start between April 1996 and March 1999, subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds. Traffic delays presently vary according to the time and season, but are particularly significant in the summer months. At the southern end of the proposed scheme, and in the town centre, the accident rate is above the national average. For the remainder, it is about the national average.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all *(a)* town/village bypass schemes and *(b)* traffic calming measures undertaken by his Department within the south Wales valleys in each year from 1990; and if he will list the schemes which are intended to be developed in (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The primary responsibility for the road network in the south Wales valleys rests with local authorities. No bypass schemes or traffic calming measures have been introduced in the valleys on trunk roads for which I am responsible since 1990. The A465 Aberdulais to Glynneath and the A470 Pentrebach to Cefn Coed improvements which it is planned to start in 1993-94 will each by-pass local communities. Road conditions are kept under review, but no specific traffic calming measures are planned on trunk roads in the valleys in 1993 or 1994.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the 1993-94 budget for each training and enterprise council in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Welsh Office are currently finalising contracts with TECs for 1993-94 budgets and the information is not yet available.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received in favour of his proposals to transfer the communities of Coychurch Lower, Ewenny, Saint Bride's Major and Wick into the Vale of Glamorgan, under his proposals for unitary authorities, from people living in these communities.

Mr. David Hunt: Since publishing my White Paper on 1 March 1993, I have received four such written representations in favour of my proposals to incorporate the communities of Coychurch Lower, Ewenny, Saint Bride's Major and Wick into a Vale of Glamorgan unitary authority.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much will be spent or has been spent in each year from 1990-91 to 1995-96 on *(a)* stage 1 ESAs, *(b)* stage 2 ESAs, *(c)* stage 3 ESAs and *(d)* stage 4 ESAs, identifying how much of the total is allocated for the public access payments; what is the amount to be spent on (i) nitrate sensitive areas, (ii) the moorland scheme, (iii) the habitat improvement scheme, (iv) set aside management, identifying how much of the total will be for public access payments and (v) organic farming in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows: Expenditure on ESA payments to farmers in Welsh ESAs was £0·9 million in 1990-91, £1·5 million in 1991-92 and £1·5 million in 1992-93.

Planned expenditure is £5·8 million in 1993-94, £7·6 million in 1994-95 and £7·8 million in 1995-96.

Public consultation proposals have been issued for public access to ESA land. Planned expenditure is £0·51 million in 1994-95 and £0·52 million in 1995-96. In addition to this expenditure on ESAs, we have also issued for public consultation proposals for a moorland scheme, a habitat improvement scheme, a meadowland scheme for public access to set-aside land and an organic scheme. Current plans for expenditure on payments to farmers under these new measures is £0·5 million in 1993-94, £2·4 million in 1994-95 and £4·8 million in 1995-96. The precise allocation between the schemes will be decided in the light of the results of the public consultation. I have no plans to designate any nitrate sensitive areas (NSAs) in Wales.

Pharmaceutical Services (Mold)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the factors upon which he based his decision to classify Mold and its outlying districts as a non-rural area for the purposes of the provision of pharmaceutical services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Questions affecting the rurality of an area are governed by the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations, 1992. In considering the issue the Secretary of State has regard to the overall density of population, including any developments or population changes which may be expected; sizes of community; distance between settlements and the spread and frequency of public transport, together with the range of local services available.

Death Rates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines he has issued, and what proposals he has to issue further guidelines, to health authorities and general practitioner fund-holding practices in Wales concerning the implications for purchasers of hospital health care of statistically significant variations in death rates in or just after treatment; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he has had with the health authorities and hospital trusts in Wales in relation to the variations in performance in hospitals with respect to death rates during or just after hospital treatment;

(3) what representations he has received with respect to the publication of league tables in relation to variations between hospitals in death rates during or just after surgery and other treatments *(a)* with and *(b)* without standardisation for age and social condition of patient intake; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will publish figures indicating the gap between the highest and lowest death rate hospitals, with respect to death rates after *(a)* general surgery, *(b)* orthopaedic surgery and *(c)* other treatments, after standardising for age and social condition of the patient intake; and what proposals he has for improviong the performance of the hospitals with death rates related to treatment, that are markedly above average;

(5) what is the maximum differential gap in death rates between the lowest and highest death rate in Welsh hospitals following *(a)* general surgery, *(b)* orthopaedic surgery and *(c)* other treatments; and what proposals he has for improving the performance of these hospitals whose death rates after surgical treatment is higher than the norm.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 30 April 1993 at column *589*.

National Lottery

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the finances that would accrue in a full year, after the deduction of all tax and other costs, from the national lottery to *(a)* sport in Wales, *(b)* performing arts in Wales, *(c)* other arts' activities in Wales and *(d)* other organisations or activities by type and category; and what percentage will be applied to revenue costs and capital costs, respectively, in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not possible to predict how much the various categories of beneficiaries will receive from the national lottery. Distribution arrangements are the subject of discussions with the distributing bodies and with other Government Departments, and the relevant criteria will be published in due course. With the exception of charities, I expect the proceeds to be used for the most part for capital projects.

Strategy Resettlement Funding

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a table showing all housing associations and other organisations which have applied for all-Wales strategy resettlement funding for 1993-94, the figure applied for in each case and the figure actually agreed by his Department.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Housing associations receive funding for strategy-related housing through Housing for Wales as part of their special needs programme. Special grants are made to county teams who negotiate and commission care at a local level with care management organisations. The programme for resettlement for this year (1993-94) will evolve during the year. However, the full year costs to counties to supply a comprehensive package of care, including accommodation for 110 individuals is estimated to be £5 million to the Welsh Office.

Grants

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what objectives he has set *(a)* each section of his Department and *(b)* each quango or body responsible in whole or in part to his Department for (i) the publication of information or criteria relating to grants available for 1993-94 (ii) the time to elapse between publication date and closing date (iii) the time for notification of a decision after the publication date and closing date, respectively, and (iv) the information to be provided to any unsuccessful applicant.

Mr. David Hunt: These matters differ from grant to grant and organisation to organisation. The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Services (South Glamorgan)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1992, *Official Report*, column 125, about the strategic plan for hospital services in South Glamorgan, what is his current estimate of the completion date of the strategic hospital planning review of South Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: While the issues of timing and content still remain a matter for the health authorities in South Glamorgan, I understand the issue of the review is imminent. I await it with interest.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the South Glamorgan and Mid Glamorgan health authorities and the provost of the Welsh national school of medicine

concerning the strategic review of future hospital and bed supply and demand and regional services provision; what is his current estimate of the prospective completion date of the review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The review known as "Collaboration on Commissioning", which was completed in December 1992, is a matter for the health authorities and the University of Wales college of medicine.

My right hon. Friend has had no meeting with the chairmen of South Glamorgan or Mid Glamorgan health authorities to discuss this review.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Job Statistics

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new jobs have been created in the past two years, how many of these are now in existence; how many jobs have been lost during the same period; and if he will give details of the types of jobs created and lost.

Mr. Atkins: Information on new job creations is not available except to the extent that 2,500 new jobs were created with assistance from the Local Enterprise Development Unit in the calendar year 1991 and 2,490 with assistance from the Industrial Development Board in the financial year 1991-92. All of these jobs were in the manufacturing and services sectors. Information on how many of these are still in existence could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures for jobs created in 1992 and 1992-93 are not yet available. The table shows redundancies notified to the Department of Economic Development in 1991 and 1992 and the sectors in which they occurred.

Confirmed redundancies

	1991	*1992*
Manufacturing	3,745	3,667
Construction	370	283
Services	1,163	1,368
Other industries	21	5
Total	5,299	5,323

Housing Development, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the application for housing development at The Oaks, Old Shore road, Newtownards —planning application No. 0028/93—has within his ownership or agreement with other landowners the land required to provide the sight lines in both directions from the entrance of the proposed development on to the public road.

Mr. Atkins: The certificate of land ownership which accompanied the application requires further investigation and I will write to the hon. Gentleman once this has been carried out.

Donaghadee Urban District Council

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, whether his Department has copies of the minutes of meetings of the former Donaghadee urban district council.

Mr. Atkins: Copies of the minutes of meetings of the former Donaghadee urban district council are held in the Public Record Office. The minutes signed on 7 August 1945, show that the council approved a plan to divide Warren house, Donaghadee into two flats. However, as indicated in my reply of 26 April, the Department does not have a copy of any decision document pursuant to this meeting of the council.

Ports Privatisation

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the draft Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 so as to make the exercise of the proposed powers to privatise ports in Northern Ireland compulsorily subject to the affirmative parliamentary procedure.

Mr. Atkins: This issue has been raised in a number of the representations received during the consultation period on the draft Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. The responses have been extremely wide-ranging and I am considering them in detail before taking any decisions on the way forward.

Health Service Wages

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the total wage bill of hospital and community health services staff in each board area, in each of the last five years and projected for the next two years, broken down into the principal groups of staff, including consultants, junior doctors and nurses.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The information is not readily available in the form requested. The Northern Ireland health and social services boards provide integrated health and personal social services. The boards' accounts for 1992-93 are currently being prepared. However, for the last five years for which accounts are available the salaries and wages bill for each board are set out in the tables. It is not possible to provide accurate forecasts of future pay bills, although for the current financial year the Government's public sector pay restraint policy is designed to hold settlements to 1 per cent.

Year ended 31 March 1992

Salaries and Wages	*Northern* £	*Southern* £	*Eastern* £	*Western* £	*Total* £
Medical	10,857,873	9,264,640	45,639,656	9,011,950	74,774,119
Dental	657,852	646,167	3,328,520	917,642	5,550,181
Trained Nursing	35,547,724	32,511,106	97,564,997	34,853,875	200,477,702
Other Nursing	4,060,649	5,497,214	16,778,697	4,641,848	30,978,408
Student Nursing	1,413,441	1,071,898	12,275,416	2,417,602	17,178,357
Para-Medical	7,822,486	5,946,629	30,220,221	5,451,678	49,441,014

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Pharmacy	702,694	685,762	2,520,212	591,065	4,499,733
Social Services	15,215,535	10,489,964	35,696,671	10,331,309	71,733,479
Home Helps	5,097,525	6,337,418	12,078,649	4,009,200	27,522,792
Administrative and Clerical	14,492,221	11,948,540	39,055,723	10,469,524	75,966,008
Domestic and Allied	9,553,491	7,028,102	37,082,454	7,336,035	61,000,082
Tradesmen	2,259,585	1,739,384	6,688,063	1,770,563	12,457,595
Ambulance	2,527,488	1,861,019	4,020,604	1,797,807	10,206,918
Other Grades	1,661,284	1,241,274	4,234,596	1,014,300	8,151,454
TOTAL	111,869,848	96,269,117	347,184,479	94,614,398	649,937,842

Year ended 31 March 1991

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Medical	9,395,468	8,532,108	41,592,665	8,098,570	67,618,811
Dental	608,836	561,370	2,224,987	823,778	4,218,971
Trained Nursing	32,014,132	29,753,099	89,063,112	31,615,746	182,446,089
Other Nursing	3,454,762	4,765,650	13,835,590	3,823,978	25,879,980
Student Nursing	2,019,098	1,377,555	14,303,464	2,823,449	20,523,566
Para-Medical	6,594,455	5,211,693	26,757,616	4,827,378	43,391,142
Pharmacy	595,954	583,736	2,260,592	506,794	3,947,076
Social Services	13,676,336	9,478,819	32,582,283	9,264,670	65,002,108
Home Helps	4,572,915	5,865,088	11,441,670	3,776,492	25,656,165
Administrative and Clerical	11,897,290	9,551,542	32,718,131	8,577,568	62,744,531
Domestic and Allied	8,813,105	8,980,095	36,464,899	7,399,067	61,657,166
Tradesmen	2,174,325	1,689,771	6,319,575	1,625,955	11,809,626
Ambulance	2,329,043	1,718,948	3,719,830	1,632,276	9,400,097
Other Grades	1,501,552	1,266,709	4,401,367	1,054,176	8,223,804
TOTAL	99,647,271	89,336,183	317,685,781	85,849,897	592,519,132

Year ended 31 March 1990

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Medical	8,404,625	7,481,029	37,562,527	6,663,507	60,111,688
Dental	522,778	544,932	1,985,297	616,934	3,669,941
Trained Nursing	29,537,228	28,396,668	85,749,268	29,736,471	173,419,635
Other Nursing	3,207,993	4,288,780	12,077,375	3,441,815	23,015,963
Student Nursing	2,196,196	1,545,937	12,198,990	2,739,662	18,680,785
Para-Medical	5,681,586	4,447,334	23,833,195	3,973,849	37,935,964
Pharmacy	504,847	343,644	1,835,626	425,165	3,109,282
Social Services	12,320,159	8,427,220	27,763,816	7,919,174	56,430,369
Home Helps	4,123,825	5,368,127	10,483,163	3,412,612	23,387,727
Administrative and Clerical	9,517,381	8,138,849	27,064,126	7,039,020	51,759,376
Domestic and Allied	8,596,144	9,364,311	35,119,034	8,915,478	61,994,967
Tradesmen	2,103,004	1,442,843	6,270,209	1,560,230	11,376,286
Ambulance	1,837,318	1,317,874	2,741,239	1,241,502	7,137,933
Other Grades	1,528,518	1,196,778	4,081,633	969,862	7,776,791
Total	90,081,[illegible]02	82,304,326	288[illegible],498	78,655,281	539,806,707

Year ended 31 March 1989

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Medical	7,678,916	7,130,059	34,825,759	6,259,215	55,893,949
Dental	546,769	512,004	2,176,636	588,609	3,824,018
Trained Nursing	28,545,400	26,930,776	81,431,637	28,986,430	165,894,243
Other Nursing	3,166,950	4,232,571	11,410,146	3,126,695	21,936,362
Student Nursing	2,078,282	1,602,090	13,583,907	2,340,112	19,874,391
Para-Medical	5,094,831	4,010,000	19,200,297	3,483,720	31,788,848
Pharmacy	441,900	369,354	1,605,101	413,840	2,830,195
Social Services	12,038,359	7,761,914	26,071,937	7,426,115	53,288,325
Home Helps	3,739,198	5,141,034	10,330,488	3,220,458	22,431,178
Administrative and Clerical	8,245,648	6,966,201	24,127,124	6,138,037	45,477,010
Domestic and Allied	8,469,583	8,959,119	33,542,449	9,546,583	60,517,734

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Tradesmen	2,024,983	1,308,826	6,296,567	1,468,345	11,098,721
Ambulance	1,998,709	1,432,929	2,994,535	1,321,300	7,747,473
Other Grades	1,452,956	1,177,486	3,906,973	1,015,776	7,553,191
TOTAL	85,522,484	77,534,363	271,773,556	75,335,235	510,165,638

Year ended 31 March 1988

Salaries and Wages	Northern £	Southern £	Eastern £	Western £	Total £
Medical	6,975,393	6,253,181	31,547,797	5,455,613	50,231,984
Dental	578,741	451,204	1,866,935	668,600	3,565,480
Trained Nursing	24,309,370	22,884,704	66,536,343	24,156,932	137,887,349
Other Nursing	2,896,608	4,041,606	10,359,937	2,935,044	20,233,195
Student Nursing	2,025,578	1,544,402	13,349,980	2,592,894	19,512,854
Para-Medical	4,533,036	3,393,604	17,572,398	2,963,565	28,462,603
Pharmacy	396,187	334,802	1,369,735	371,617	2,472,341
Social Services	10,969,179	6,974,665	23,369,826	6,606,819	47,920,489
Home Helps	3,671,358	4,881,977	9,938,176	3,330,588	21,822,099
Administrative and Clerical	7,578,908	6,440,513	22,204,442	5,537,068	41,760,931
Domestic and Allied	8,172,924	8,603,619	32,049,983	9,354,802	58,181,328
Tradesmen	2,025,649	1,430,688	6,184,258	1,403,969	11,044,564
Ambulance	1,922,675	1,444,550	2,813,902	1,298,892	7,480,019
Other Grades	1,292,214	1,065,708	3,617,468	924,405	6,899,795
TOTAL	77,347,820	69,745,223	242,781,180	67,600,808	457,475,031

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the changes in average pay levels for general practitioners, nurses, consultants and hospital porters in Northern Ireland since May 1990.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The information is set out in the table. Average monetary changes could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Group	Increase for 1991-92 Per cent.	Increase for 1992-93 Per cent.	Increase for 1993-94 Per cent.
General practitioners	9·50	5·50	1·50
Nurses and midwives	8·20	5·80	[1] 1·50
Senior nurses/midwives	7·43	3·90	[2] —
Consultants	10·50	5·50	1·50
Hospital porters	8·80	4·93	[1] 1·50

[1] Offered.
[2] No offer yet.

Community Midwives

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many community midwives are employed by each health board in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The number of community midwives employed by each health and social services board at 31 December 1992 was as follows:

Board	Number	Whole-time equivalent
Eastern	61	57·45
Northern	35	31·13
Southern	27	23·65
Western	42	41·75

NATIONAL FINANCE

Incomes

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage share, and average amount per equivalent adult at 1990 prices, of disposable income by quintile groups of households for *(a)* households with children, *(b)* other households and *(c)* all households, for 1979, 1987 and 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not available in the precise form requested because the equivalence scale used is based on households rather than adults. In addition the figures are only available at current prices.

Average equivalised disposable income and percentage shares by households type and by quintile groups of households ranked by equivalised disposable income
Using the McClements equivalence scale re-scaled so that a household of one adult = 1

£ per year

	Bottom	2nd	3rd	4th	Top	All
1979						
Households with children						
Average	1,161	1,706	2,223	2,882	4,462	2,405
Percentage share of total income	2	6	10	10	9	37
Other households						
Average	1,186	1,654	2,240	2,947	4,494	2,558
Percentage share of total income	7	7	8	13	27	63

	Bottom	2nd	3rd	4th	Top	All
All households						
Average	1,180	1,677	2,231	2,918	4,487	2,498
Percentage share of total income	9	13	18	23	36	100
1987						
Households with children						
Average	2,225	3,329	4,547	6,184	10,763	5,059
Percentage share of total income	3	4	7	8	9	31
Other households						
Average	2,297	3,253	4,538	6,273	11,473	4,548
Percentage share of total income	6	8	9	14	32	69
All households						
Average	2,273	5,372	7,446	10,228	18,544	9,063
Percentage share of total income	8	12	16	23	41	100
1990						
Households with children						
Average	2,632	4,237	6,062	8,766	15,627	6,976
Percentage share of total income	2	4	7	8	9	30
Other households						
Average	2,688	4,085	6,110	8,698	16,752	7,934
Percentage share of total income	5	7	9	15	33	70
All households						
Average	2,671	4,134	6,089	8,721	16,493	7,621
Percentage share of total income	7	11	16	23	43	100

Percentages are rounded independently and may not sum to row or column totals.

Households with children have fallen as a proportion of the sample from 39 per cent. in 1979 to 33 per cent. in 1990. This is the main reason that their share of income has fallen from 37 per cent. in 1979 to 30 per cent. in 1990. The variation in the shares of income between household types by quintile group is mainly a reflection of the different composition of the quintile groups.

These figures are not strictly comparable over time because of changes in classification of both income and taxation and because of changes in the family expenditure survey.

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of equivalised disposable income, at 1990 prices, for all households for the years 1977 to 1990, on the basis given in *Economic Trends* for January 1993, page 187.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The total value of equivalised disposable income for households in the sample at current prices can be obtained by multiplying the sample size by the average equivalised disposable income. It is not possible to calculate the total value for all households in the United Kingdom as the appropriate grossing factors are not available.

The average values of equivalised disposable income for all households for alternate years from 1977 to 1987 and for 1988 are published in the March 1991 edition of "Economic Trends", the average values for 1989 and 1990 are published in the January 1992 and January 1993 editions respectively. The January 1993 edition of "Economic Trends" has references to the annual articles.

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average value in 1979, 1987 and 1990, at 1990 prices per equivalent adult in households with children of *(a)* contributory benefits in cash, *(b)* non-contributory benefits in cash, *(c)* direct taxes, *(d)* indirect taxes, *(e)* equivalised disposable income, *(f)* benefits in kind and *(g)* final income, within the bottom and top quintiles of all households ranked by disposable income.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not available in the precise form requested because the equivalence scale used is based on households rather than adults. In addition, the figures are available only at current prices.

Average values of taxes and benefits, for bottom and top quintiles ranked by equivalised disposable income of all households
Households with children

	1979		1987		1990	
	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top
£ per year						
Contributory cash benefits	328	112	396	115	370	156
Non-Contributory cash benefits	1,066	355	3,356	700	3,689	735
Direct Taxes and NIC	461	2,772	721	7,728	1,026	9,748
Indirect taxes	695	1,817	1,442	3,653	1,772	4,805
Equivalised disposable income[1]	1,903	7,314	3,648	17,645	4,315	25,618
Benefits in kind	1,883	1,182	3,529	2,511	4,367	3,061
Final income	4,072	9,839	7,261	23,703	8,500	34,397

[1] Using the McClements equivalence scale with a household of a married couple = 1.

Notes:
Due to possible mis-recording of some non-contributory benefits as contributory benefits, the split between the two types of benefit should be treated with caution.
The equivalence scales used in the analysis are only applicable to disposable income. It is not appropriate to apply them to other income measures or composite parts of those measures.
These figures are not strictly comparable over time because of changes in classification of taxes and benefits and because of changes in the Family Expenditure Survey.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the *(a)* total income of the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers, *(b)* unearned income of the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers, *(c)* unearned income of all taxpayers, *(d)* total number of taxpayers and *(e)* number of taxpayers in the top 1 per cent. in each year since 1979;

(2) what was the total unearned income of *(a)* all taxpayers and *(b)* the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers divided into income from (i) shares and securities, (ii) bank and interest-bearing accounts, (iii) building societies accounts and deposits, (iv) rents, (v) pensions and annuities and (vi) other, with details for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Available information is given in the tables. Estimates of income are based on information reported to tax offices and collected through annual surveys of personal incomes. For years before 1985-86, estimates exclude employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes and some investment income on which tax is deducted at source. It is therefore not possible to provide estimates of the total unearned income of all taxpayers, although information on the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers is available. For years up to and including 1989-90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation, for 1990-91 onwards, husbands and wives are counted separately. Estimates for 1991-92 and 1992-93 are based on projections of the 1990-91 survey and are therefore provisional, and detailed information on the breakdown of unearned income is not available.

	Total income of top 1 per cent. of taxpayers £ *billion*	*Total unearned income of top 1 per cent. of taxpayers* £ *billion*	*Total unearned income of all taxpayers* £ *billion*	*Total taxpayers* *(million)*	*Number of taxpayers in top 1 per cent.* *(thousands)*
1978-79	5·0	1·2	—	21·4	214
1983-84	9·7	1·9	—	20·4	204
1984-85	10·9	1·8	—	20·2	202
1985-86	12·9	2·3	—	20·2	202
1986-87	14·6	2·8	19·2	20·4	204
1987-88	16·4	3·1	21·0	20·8	208
1988-89	21·2	5·3	25·4	21·3	213
1989-90	24·2	7·0	35·2	21·5	215
1990-91	28·3	7·2	41·9	26·0	260
1991-92	29·0	6·5	35·2	25·3	253
1992-93	28·7	6·6	31·8	24·7	247

£ *billion*

	All taxpayers				*Top 1 per cent. of taxpayers*			
	Dividends	*Bank and Building Society Interest*	*Rents*	*Other unearned income*	*Dividends*	*Bank and Building Society Interest*	*Rents*	*Other unearned income*
1978-79	—	—	—	—	0·5	0·1	0·1	0·4
1983-84	—	—	—	—	0·7	0·3	0·2	0·8
1984-85	—	—	—	—	0·6	0·4	0·2	0·7
1985-86	—	—	—	—	0·8	0·8	0·2	0·6
1986-87	3·7	11·8	1·0	2·7	1·0	0·8	0·3	0·7
1987-88	4·8	12·1	1·1	3·0	1·2	0·8	0·2	0·9
1988-89	6·9	13·4	1·5	3·6	2·5	1·3	0·3	1·1
1989-90	8·1	21·0	2·0	4·2	3·3	1·6	0·5	1·7
1990-91	8·7	26·4	1·8	5·0	3·0	2·0	0·4	1·8

Employment Earnings

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total earnings in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms from self-employment and employment in the manufacturing and service sectors by standard industrial classification of the earnings source in *(a)* 1963, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1979 and *(d)* the most recent period for which information is available; and what were the percentage changes for each sector between each of those successive dates.

Mr. Nelson: Figures for income from employment in the manufacturing and service sectors, analysed on the basis of the standard industrial classification in use at the time of publication, may be found in the following CSO publications:

1963 National Income and Expenditure 1963-73: tables 18 and 20 (wages and salaries only).

1974 (on 1968 Standard industrial Classification): National Income and Expenditure 1982 edition: tables 3.1 and 3.3.

1974 (on 1980 classification) and later years may be found in the appropriate issues of the National Accounts Blue Book, Tables 2.1 and 2.3, and also on the CSO database, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Estimates of income from self-employment by sector are not available.

There are no official estimates of components of personal incomes measured at constant prices.

Ministers' Accommodation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax the benefits in kind received by Ministers who have access to official accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to change the tax treatment of any accommodation provided for Ministers.

London and Bishopsgate Investment Management

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc applied to his Department for a principal's licence to carry on the business of dealing in securities under the provisions of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958.

Mr. Nelson: On 28 February 1988.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *749*, to which firm or sole trader, whose

application was received after 27 February 1988, his Department granted a licence to carry on the business of dealing in securities under the provisions of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958.

Mr. Nelson: London and Bishopsgate International Investments Management plc.

Matrix Churchill

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why a package sent recently, via Federal Express, by Mr. Douglas Franze from Washington, USA, addressed to Mr. Paul Henderson, a former managing director of Matrix Churchill, was inspected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: As part of their general anti-smuggling activity Customs and Excise regularly examine a proportion of imported packages to check for undeclared goods and to protect society from the importation of items which are prohibited or restricted.

Petroleum Revenue Tax

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact upon the Scottish oil industry of the Budget proposals for changes in petroleum revenue taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: To the extent that production is within the charge to petroleum revenue tax (PRT), doubling investors' marginal share of profit should encourage investment in, and extend the life of, fields. Removing the burden of PRT from new fields will both increase after-tax costs and increase after-tax profits that would have been subject to PRT. So companies will have greater incentives to undertake commercially-viable investment. That should prove beneficial to the United Kingdom offshore industry and its onshore support, including onshore support situated in Scotland.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the total exploration and appraisal relief given against PRT liabilities over the last three years was allocated to *(a)* wells, *(b)* seismic, *(c)* overheads, *(d)* insurance and *(e)* other expenditure.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information requested is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the Audit Commission report into local government finance.

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand that the Audit Commission plan to publish its report into standard spending assessments around the middle of May.

Local Government Reform

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the reasons for creating a commission to investigate local Government reform in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: We established the Local Government Commission to make recommendations on local government structure and boundaries having regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government, against the background of a variety of existing local authorities in England.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities, of each type, existed in England on 31 March 1974; how many of each type now exist; and when he expects the commission on local government reform to report.

Mr. Robin Squire: In England, on 31 March 1974 there were:

	Number
County councils	45
Greater London council	1
County boroughs	79
Non-county boroughs	227
Urban district councils	449
Rural district councils	410
London boroughs	32
City of London	1

At present there are:

	Number
County councils	39
Shire district councils	296
Metropolitan district councils	36
London boroughs	32
City of London	1

The Local Government Commission is carrying out its reviews of local government structure in the shire counties of England in rolling programme. The commission will be making recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as it completes each review. The commission has submitted its final report on the future structure of local government on the Isle of Wight and it is currently reviewing the other areas in the first tranche of its work programme.

Estate Action

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties in Estate Action schemes have been disposed of to the private sector.

Mr. Baldry: Excluding properties sold under the right to buy, it is expected that some 29,000 dwellings will have been disposed of to the private sector by the end of 1993-94.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present value of land held by each urban development corporation.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Wednesday 8 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *253*.

Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts; and if his consultations about changes will include housing associations.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans at present to amend the current legislation.

EMPLOYMENT

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes she proposes to make in the occupational radiation exposure limits.

Mr. McLoughlin: The UK's radiation dose limits for workers, comply with the current EC (Euratom) Directive on basic standards for radiation protection. Revision of this directive, and the dose limits therein, will begin later this year. There are no plans to reduce dose limits in advance of revision of the directive.

Graduate

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures her Department is taking to reduce the number of university graduates who are unemployed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Department is providing a wider range of measures than ever before to provide all unemployed people, including graduates, with the help they need to find a job. Some of these measures may be particularly appropriate for graduates, for example job review workshops, job search seminars or executive jobclubs. Training and enterprise councils have discretion to tailor training for work programmes specifically for unemployed graduates.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of female employees work *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time;

(2) what percentage of male employees work *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time.

Mr. McLoughlin: In December 1992, 54 per cent. of female employees in the United Kingdom worked full time and 46 per cent. worked part time. At the same date 89 per cent. of male employees worked full time and 11 per cent. worked part time.

Training

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the youth training credit pilot schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 8 March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the next 10 training and enterprise councils (TECs) in England and Wales to be asked to develop youth credits. This round, the third in the progressive extension of the initiative, brings the number of TECs (and local enterprise companies in Scotland) offering or developing credits for young people to 34. The Government's aim is that, by 1996, every 16 and 17 year old who chooses to leave full-time education will have the offer of a credit.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she will publish guidelines for the operating of training for work schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: Planning guidance for 1993-94 was issued to training and enterprise councils (TECs) on 4 December 1992. The operating agreement, setting out the contractual requirements for running training for work was issued to TECs during the first week in March.

Maternity Leave

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received from employers and employers organisations on the extension of the 14-week maternity leave period set out in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill to 18 weeks.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have received one letter from an employer and one from an employers' organisation calling for an extension of the maternity leave period to 18 weeks. The Government are, however, satisfied from the extensive consultations carried out on the EC Pregnant Workers Directive that the great majority of employers wish the burdens on business arising from its implementation to be kept to a minimum.

Health and Safety

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she has any plans to extend the pilot scheme currently running in Scotland involving public access to health and safety inspectors' reports.

Mr. McLoughlin: This exercise in making some information of inspectors reports publicly available was set up by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on a pilot basis and encompasses reports on inspections made by the field operations division in Scotland from 5 January 1993. It is intended that the exercise will cover inspections made until at least 30 June. I am informed that the HSE will be evaluating the exercise over the next few weeks before deciding whether to extend it.

Mine Safety

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what actions she proposes to take to secure amendment to the regulations concerning mine safety; what proposals she has received to this end; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1983 the Health and Safety Commission, which advises my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on health and safety legislation, put in hand a programme to renew mining legislation. Regulations have been made, and codes of practice approved, for safety of exits at mines, electricity at work at mines, explosives in coal and other safety-lamp mines, and shafts and winding in mines. My right hon. Friend has recently received proposals for regulations and an approved code of practice for the management and administration of safety and health at mines.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it her policy in her consideration of changes to the safety regulations applying to mines to adhere to the principles relating to maintenance or improvement of existing regulations set out in section 1 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. McLoughlin: The replacement of pre-1974 health and safety legislation is subject to section 1(2) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which requires such replacement to maintain or improve the standards of health, safety and welfare established by or under the earlier legislation.

The Health and Safety Commission and the Government are committed to the maintenance and improvement of safety standards within the mining industry and this will remain a constant and paramount objective.

Industrial Action

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish the number of days lost due to official and unofficial industrial action for each year since 1978; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Because of the practical difficulties in distinguishing between official and unofficial disputes such an analysis was discontinued in 1981. However, a special exercise for the Government's Green Paper "Unofficial Action and the Law", showed that approximately 1·3 million working days were lost in unofficial stoppages in 1988, more than one third of the 3·7 million days lost in the year. Data for 1978 to 1980 are as follows:

Year	Working days lost (Thousands)	
	Known official	Unofficial and not known
1978	4,052	5,353
1979	23,512	5,962
1980	10,081	1,883

Wages Councils

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received against the abolition of wages councils since the Trade Union and Employment Rights Bill received its Third Reading in the House.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* I have received a number of representations since Third Reading in the House, both supporting and opposing abolition. Since announcement of the Bill over 85 per cent. of letters from employers and employer bodies support abolition.

LORD CHANCELLORS DEPARTMENT

Juvenile Courts

Miss Lestor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many children were brought before juvenile courts in each of the last five years; and how many of them had school reports submitted on their behalf.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

Information on juveniles aged 10 and under 17 proceeded against at magistrates courts is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Table 6.1 refers. The latest available figures are for 1991; 1992 figures will be available in the autumn.

Information on the number of school reports submitted to youth courts is not collected centrally.

Table 6.1 Defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates' courts by type of offence
Extract from Criminal Statistics
England and Wales 1991

Year	Total number proceeded against (thousands)	Number of defendants (thousands)			Percentage		
		Indictable offences	Summary offences		Indictable offences	Summary offences	
			Offences (excluding motoring offences)	Motoring offences		Offences (excluding motoring offences)	Motoring offences
Persons aged 10 and under 17							
1981	130	95	22	13	73	17	10
1982	121	90	20	12	74	16	9
1983	112	82	20	11	73	17	10
1984	105	78	17	9	75	16	9
1985	94	71	15	8	76	16	8
1986	75	57	11	6	76	15	8
1987	68	53	10	5	78	15	7
1988	62	48	10	4	77	16	7
1989	55	37	14	4	66	26	8
1990	54	36	13	4	67	25	8
1991	50	35	12	4	69	24	7
Persons aged 17 and under 21							
1981	390	144	85	161	37	22	41
1982	394	152	82	160	38	21	41
1983	394	149	86	159	38	22	40
1984	372	148	79	145	40	21	39
1985	364	149	75	140	41	21	38

Year	Total number proceeded against (thousands)	Number of defendants (thousands)			Percentage		
		Indictable offences	Summary offences		Indictable offences	Summary offences	
			Offences (excluding motoring offences)	Motoring offences		Offences (excluding motoring offences)	Motoring offences
1986	339	133	70	136	39	21	40
1987	325	140	74	110	43	23	34
1988	322	137	79	106	43	25	33
1989	324	122	90	112	38	28	35
1990	329	129	85	114	39	26	35
1991	314	132	73	110	42	23	35
Defendants aged 21 and over[1]							
1981	1,774	284	365	1,125	16	21	63
1982	1,706	297	366	1,042	17	21	61
1983	1,797	300	415	1,082	17	23	60
1984	1,708	295	385	1,028	17	23	60
1985	1,689	299	379	1,011	18	22	60
1986	1,757	273	427	1,057	16	24	60
1987	1,451	295	421	735	20	29	51
1988	1,480	310	454	716	21	31	48
1989	1,484	290	464	730	20	31	49
1990	1,509	304	478	727	20	32	48
1991	1,591	323	488	780	20	31	49
All Defendants[1]							
1981	2,294	523	472	1,299	23	21	59
1982	2,221	539	469	1,214	24	21	55
1983	2,303	530	521	1,252	23	23	54
1984	2,184	521	482	1,181	24	22	54
1985	2,147	520	469	1,158	24	22	54
1986	2,171	463	508	1,199	21	23	55
1987	1,843	488	505	850	26	27	46
1988	1,863	494	543	826	27	29	44
1989	1,864	449	568	847	24	30	45
1990	1,892	469	577	846	25	31	45
1991	1,956	489	573	894	25	29	46

[1]Including "other defendants", i.e., companies, public bodies, etc.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold an early meeting with representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Our aim is to give effective support to the continuing inter-communal negotiations on Cyprus under UN auspices. The timing of any possible meeting with Turkish Cypriot representatives must be carefully considered in the light of progress in those negotiations.

Radio 4

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the United Kingdom's ambassador in Bonn has taken in respect of the petition received signed by listeners in Germany on the retention of Radio 4 on long wave; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's ambassador in Bonn has forwarded the petition to London for the BBC, who are reviewing their future plans for transmitting Radio 4, taking into account the various representations which they are receiving.

Cambodia

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what position the United Kingdom representative on the United Nations Security Council will take in relation to a continuing UN presence in Cambodia following the holding of elections there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The mandate of the UN transitional authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) is due to end with the formation of a new Cambodian Government three months after the Constituent Assembly elections on 23-27 May. The UN is likely to maintain a strong presence in Cambodia after this through its specialised and humanitarian agencies and programmes, including for example UNESCO, FAO/WFP, UNDP and UNICEF.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what position the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations is taking in relation to requests for a war crimes tribunal or special genocide commission to investigate the actions of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Mr. Goodlad: No such proposal is currently under consideration at the United Nations. In the absence of an international tribunal with jurisdiction to try Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge for genocide, Pol Pot and his associates would have to be brought before a competent Cambodian

court. It is therefore for the new Cambodian Government to decide whether to bring them to trial. If this were to happen, we would be the last to object.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to assist the release of funds promised by the United Nations to Cambodia for reconstruction and the clearing of land mines.

Mr. Goodlad: The international community has pledged $880 million for the reconstruction of Cambodia over a number of years, of which some $94·3 million has been disbursed. The flow of international aid is likely to increase substantially once a new government is in place in Phnom Penh. We regret the failure so far of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia to sign an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development package to help with the reconstruction of Cambodia, and urge all Cambodian parties to reach agreement on this as soon as possible. We have pledged some $30 million of aid since October 1991 of which $23 million has been committed. We have contributed funds to the HALO Trust, a British non-governmental organisation involved in mine clearance in Cambodia and to the funding of the Cambodian mine action centre through our assessed contribution to the UN transitional authority in Cambodia.

Political Parties (Funding)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the information available to him on the systems of state funding for political parties in the G7 group of countries, and in the Council of Europe.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the number of United Kingdom representatives in each of the constituent nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mr. Goodlad: The numbers of United Kingdom-based staff are as follows:

	Number
Ukraine	19
Moscow	83
St. Petersburg	7
Kazakhstan	3

We propose to open posts in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Belarus shortly. The other countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States are covered by United Kingdom staff based in Moscow.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which states are in membership of the CSCE at the present time; and which of these belonged in November 1990.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are currently 53 states participating in the CSCE. A copy of the list has been placed in the Library of the House. This list also indicates which states belonged to the CSCE in November 1990.

Yugoslavia was suspended from participation in all CSCE activity in July 1992. The Czech Republic and Slovakia were admitted as separate countries on 1 January 1993. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted observer status at the committee of senior officials meeting on 28 April.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names and nationalities of the committee of senior officials of the CSCE.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Meetings of the committee of senior officials are attended by representatives from each CSCE participating state, either its representative (normally an Ambassador) in Vienna or a senior official from its Foreign Ministry. The United Kingdom is normally represented by Mr. David Logan, an assistant under-secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. By way of illustration a list of delegates at the committee of senior officials meeting in Prague from 2-4 February has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the locations of all the offices of the secretariat, the committee of senior officials and all other institutions of the CSCE.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The main centre for CSCE institutions is Vienna where the following are located: the conflict prevention centre and its secretariat, the Vienna group of the committee of senior officials, the secretariat for the Forum for Security Co-operation and the secretariat facilities for the CFE treaty and open skies implementation group. The recently appointed secretary-general will also have his office in Vienna.

By tradition the committee of senior officials meets in Prague and is serviced by the CSCE secretariat there.

There are three other CSCE institutions: the CSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is situated in Warsaw; the office of the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities is in The Hague; the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSCE has its office in Copenhagen.

Finally, the CSCE has resident preventative diplomacy missions in a number of conflict or potential conflict areas and sanctions assistance missions in countries neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subsidiary working bodies, committees and structures established by the committee of senior officials of the CSCE together with the names and nationalities of their members.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Council of Ministers of the CSCE, meeting in Stockholm in December 1992, instructed representatives of participating states to meet regularly in Vienna between sessions of the committee of senior officials (CSO). This body is now known as the CSO Vienna group.

Ad Hoc groups of all participating states may also be formed to deal with a specific task. These are then dissolved after their task has been completed. There are

currently ad hoc groups dealing with the management of CSCE resources and with CSCE structures and institutions. A group will shortly be established to consider the legal status of CSCE institutions.

An informal financial committee of experts meets as and when required to review the budgets proposed for CSCE institutions and activities and to make recommendations to the CSO.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the Sudan about the arrest, detention, and release of members of the Umma party in Sudan in April.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We raised with the Sudanese the brief detention in April of Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Umma party, and we shall continue to monitor cases of arbitrary arrest in the Sudan.

India

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indian Government on behalf of Mr. Pritam Sing Kang and his case of mistaken identity at New Delhi airport.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The High Commission in New Delhi was not contacted at the time and has no trace of the incident, but has written twice to the foreigners regional registration officer requesting a report. It has not so far received a reply.

The Indian authorities alone decide who may or may not enter Indian territory and we have no standing to challenge their decision.

North Korea

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the decision of North Korea to withdraw from the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom is determined to maintain and strengthen the non-proliferation treaty. We deeply regret the announcement by North Korea on 12 March of their intention to withdraw from the Treaty. With the Treaty's other co-depositaries and with our European partners we have urged North Korea to reconsider their position. We are now participating actively in discussions in the United Nations Security Council aimed at ensuring North Korea's compliance with their treaty obligations.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the procedure necessary to provide for the election by Gibraltar of a member of the European Parliament; and what is the Government's policy on this issue.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Gibraltar does not participate in elections to the European Parliament. We have no plans to change this situation. Annex II of the EC Act on Direct Elections of 1976 limits the franchise for elections to the European Parliament to the United Kingdom.

Entry Clearance

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated cost of the proposed monitoring officer examining refusals of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is too early to make firm costings.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The following meetings are planned:

4 May:	Industrial Affairs Council
10 May:	Telecommunications Council
10-11 May:	Foreign Affairs Council
11 May:	Foreign Affairs/Gulf Cooperation Council
17 May:	Cultural Affairs Council
24-25 May:	Agricultural Council
25 May:	Development Council
27 May:	Health Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

(a) *Industrial Affairs Council—4 May*

Restructuring of the steel industry of the Community
ECSC Treaty
Industrial competitiveness and environmental protection
State Aid for ship building
Maritime industries
Small and medium sized enterprises. Community measures to intensify and ensure the continuity of a policy for enterprise.

(b) *Telecommunications Council—10 May*

European Telecommunications Equipment Industry (8304/92; 5704/92)
Telecommunications Services Review
Open network provision voice telephoning directive (8840/92)
Postal services Green paper
Introduction of Advanced Television Services (6242/92)
Development of Technology and Standards in the Advanced Television Sector

(c) *Foreign Affairs Council—10-11 May*

Trade Policy Questions
Relations with the EP
Commission report on access to information
Russia
Central and Eastern Europe
Ex-Yugoslavia
Preparation of EC/ACP Ministerial—17-18 May
Preparation of EC/GCC Ministerial
Preparation of OECD Ministerial: trade and environment

(d) *EC/Gulf Co-operation Council—11 May*

Implementation of the Co-operation Agreement
Exchange of views on the development of economic relations between the countries of the GCC and the Community
Report of Joint Co-operation Committee to the Joint Co-operation Council on the implementation of the Co-operation Agreement
Exchange of views on developments in the two regions:
Gulf Co-operation Council
European Community
Exchange of views on questions of political interest

(e) *Cultural Affairs Council—17 May*

European Cultural Month 1995
The Media Programme
The Artemis Programme
Draft resolution to create a scheme for the translation of dramatic works
Future work on books and reading

(f) *Agriculture Council—24-25 May*

Price fixing
Milk
Sugar
Cereal Quality
GATT

Potatoes
CAT reform
Portuguese wine distillation
(g) *Development Council—25 May*
Development Co-operation in the run-up to 2000
Human rights, Democracy and Development
Population Policy Family planning
Emergency Aid
Untying of Aid
Women in development
UNCED follow-up
The Special EC initiative for Africa
(h) *Health Council—27 May*
Resolution of future actions in the field of public health
Conclusions on reduction of consumption of tobacco
Policy debate on tobacco advertising
Conclusions on "Europe against AIDS" programme
Conclusions on "Europe against Cancer" programme (poss)
Conclusions on "Smoking in Public Places"—(5867/93)

The *Industrial Affairs Council* will meet on 4 May and will discuss restructuring of the steel industry of the Community; ECSC Treaty; Industrial competitiveness and environmental protection. Ministers will also discuss state aid for shipbuilding and maritime industries. There will be a policy discussion on small and medium sized enterprises.

The *Telecommunications Council* will meet on 10 May to attempt to reach a common position on ONP voice telephony. Adoption of Council conclusions on the Commission Communication on the European Telecommunication Equipment Industry will be sought. Ministers will seek to adopt the proposed decision on the introduction of advanced television services. Adoption is also sought on the proposed Council resolution on the development of Technology and Standards in the Advanced Television Sector. The Postal Services Green paper is also scheduled for discussion.

The *Foreign Affairs Council* will meet on 10-11 May. EC Foreign Ministers will consider Trade Policy Questions; relations with the EP; Commission report on access to information. Ministers will also consider Russia; Central and Eastern Europe and Ex-Yugoslavia.

The *Foreign Affairs/Gulf Cooperation Council* will meet on 11 May to discuss the implementation of the Cooperation agreement. Ministers will also exchange views on developments in the two regions and on questions of political interest.

The *Cultural Affairs Council* will meet on 17 May. The agenda has not yet been finalised, but the European Cultural Month 1995, the media programme, and the Artemis programme are likely to be discussed. There may also be a draft resolution to create a scheme for the translation of dramatic works. Future work on books and reading may also be discussed.

The *Agricultural Council* will meet on 24-25 May. Ministers will discuss price fixing; milk, sugar; cereal quality; GATT; potatoes; CAP reform and Portuguese wine distillation.

The *Development Council* is planned for 25 May. The agenda has not yet been finalised, but development Cooperation in the run-up to 2000; Human Rights—Democracy and development; and Population Policy—family planning are likely to be discussed. Emergency Aid, Untying of Aid and women in development are also likely to be discussed. Ministers may also discuss UNCED follow-up and the "Special EC initiative for Africa".

The *Health Council* will meet on 27 May to discuss a resolution on future actions in the field of public health. Ministers will discuss the draft decision on the cancer programme which notes the Commission's report on the effectiveness of action undertaken in the "Europe Against Cancer" programme over the past five years. Ministers will discuss the conclusions on "Europe against AIDS" programme and the conclusions on reducing smoking in the Community which stress the importance of price as a mechanism to reduce tobacco consumption. The conclusions on smoking in public places will also be discussed.

UN Register of Conventional Arms Transfers

Mr. Booth: To the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what date the Government submitted to the United Nations' Secretary General a return from the United Kingdom to the UN register of conventional arms transfers in New York; and if he will place a copy of the return in the Library.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We submitted our first return to the UN Register to the UN Secretary General on 30 April. It covers major arms imports and exports during the calendar year 1992. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Mohammed Gham Ghani

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he is going to make a recommendation in the case (Ref: CON/4028) of Shenaz Begum, Afsar Khan and Shaira Begum, the children of Mr. Mohammed Gham Ghani, referred to his Department by the post in Islamabad on 2 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The immigration service interviewed Mr. Mohammed Ghani on 18 April. When a copy of the interview notes is received from them, the passport applications made to the British High Commission at Islamabad on behalf of Mr. Ghani's three children, will be considered again.

I will write to the hon. Member as soon as a decision has been made on this case.

Nuclear Energy

106. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the Commission's work programme 1993-94, SEC(93)58 Final published on 26 January; and what is his policy towards the proposal to change the scope of Euratom safeguards included in the programme.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

The contents of the Commission work programme have been received and noted. There has been no official response by Her Majesty's Government but the work programme and an explanatory memorandum have been deposited in Parliament.

There is no direct reference in the work programme to Euratom safeguards.

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations with non-governmental organisations the United Kingdom Government have been required or recommended to make prior to making submissions to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concerning article II of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and which non-governmental organisations have been consulted prior to submissions being made.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 20 April 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

While there is no formal obligation to consult, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has welcomed contributions by non-governmental groups in the preparation of reports under the covenant.

I will write to the hon. Member about the second part of his question once necessary consultations with a number of other Government Departments is completed.

DEFENCE

Malaysia (Arms Contract)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Minister signed the 1986 agreement with the Malaysian Government in respect of an arms contract; who signed on behalf of the Malaysian Government; what was the original estimated value of this contract; and what has been the delivered value of goods to date.

Mr. Aitken: I am not aware of any such agreement signed in 1986. My right hon. and noble Friend the former Prime Minister and the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir signed a memorandum of understanding in September 1988 under which the Malaysian Government agreed to purchase various military equipments from the United Kingdom. The terms of the MOU cannot be released from reasons of commercial confidentiality, but since the signature of the MOU the Malaysian Government and British industry have signed a number of contracts whose total value exceed £16 billion.

Civil Aircraft Notifications

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many notifications were made under the civil aircraft notification procedure in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of notifications made under the civil aircraft notification procedure in 1991 and 1992 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1991	139
1992	535

The increase between 1991 and 1992 follows the raising of the height for notification of aerial activity under this procedure from 500 to 1,000 ft.

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying were received in each month since June 1991 from addresses in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* England.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The numbers of inquiries or complaints relating to military low flying training which my Department received over the period June 1991 to March 1993 from addresses in Wales, Scotland and England were as follows:

Month	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*England*
1991			
June	95	52	274
July	159	62	605
August	101	100	644
September	97	99	374
October	79	43	295
November	51	77	223
December	25	45	108
1992			
January	32	52	126
February	60	108	203
March	43	104	275
April	66	66	275
May	145	90	661
June	123	96	668
July	117	154	610
August	97	91	372
September	67	77	327
October	99	92	391
November	35	34	315
December	20	26	178
1993			
January	23	38	168
February	27	104	167
March	48	106	347

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints were received about low-flying aircraft in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 in (i) England (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland; and what proportion of such complaints related to (1) fast jets, (2) light jet trainers, (3) heavy propeller-driven aircraft, (4) light propeller-driven aircraft and (5) helicopters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The numbers of inquiries or complaints relating to military low flying training received in 1991 and 1992 from England, Scotland and Wales were as follows:

	Number of complaints	
	1991	*1992*
England	3,412	4,401
Scotland	791	990
Wales	643	904

Information on the proportion of complaints by categories of aircraft could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the military low-level training sorties flown over the United Kingdon in each year since 1987 took place wholly or partly between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not available. Central records of night low flying do not separately distinguish flying between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am. The aim is to complete low flying training before 11 pm wherever possible because it is recognised that aircraft noise can be particularly intrusive at night and only the minimum necessary of such activity is authorised.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* bird sanctuaries, *(b)* wildlife breeding sites and *(c)* nature reserves which are the subject of seasonal or permanent low-flying avoidance arrangements in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It remains our policy not to release detailed information on the United Kingdom military low-flying system. Fifty-seven sanctuaries, wildlife breeding sites and nature reserves are, however, the subject of seasonal or permanent low-flying avoidance arrangements.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the results of exercises held by the Royal

Air Force since 1985 to measure the perceived noise on the ground, generated by overflying low-level military jet aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy of the report "Noise levels of military aircraft at low altitude: Exercise Luce Belle" is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying sorties were carried out over *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland during (i) 1991 and (ii) 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not available. A typical low-level sortie covers some 300 to 500 miles and commonly covers more than one of the areas mentioned. Fixed-wing low flying training is not currently undertaken in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a monthly breakdown of the figures for low-level military training sorties over the United Kingdom since 1987.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Year and month	*Sorties*
1987	
January	8,822
February	12,527
March	12,515
April	13,006
May	14,364
June	13,787
July	14,071
August	11,959
September	12,954
October	11,950
November	12,892
December	8,814
Total	147,661
1988	
January	11,179
February	14,279
March	15,494
April	11,733
May	12,990
June	14,220
July	12,653
August	13,182
September	11,459
October	11,589
November	13,105
December	9,408
Total	151,291
1989	
January	13,168
February	11,702
March	11,816
April	12,398
May	14,299
June	15,641
July	14,282
August	11,279
September	9,376
October	12,682
November	11,462
December	6,218
Total	144,323
1990	
January	11,263
February	10,152
March	16,362
April	10,871
May	13,329
June	11,709
July	13,704
August	11,309
September	11,360
October	13,166
November	11,834
December	6,330
Total	141,390
1991	
January	8,990
February	7,471
March	10,814
April	12,300
May	12,556
June	11,662
July	12,971
August	10,676
September	11,229
October	11,097
November	11,226
December	6,408
Total	127,400
1992	
January	9,628
February	12,691
March	13,176
April	10,575
May	12,276
June	12,105
July	13,105
August	10,003
September	11,291
October	11,058
November	9,684
December	5,872
Total	131,464
1993	
January	9,024
February	10,121
March	13,009

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of Skyguard radars within the United Kingdom which are currently utilised to monitor low-flying activity.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Skyguard radar system used to monitor low flying activity within the United Kingdom is based at RAF Waddington. The radars are mobile and are deployed to various locations around the country to monitor low flying.

Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which armoured vehicles currently deployed in Bosnia are to be replaced by vehicles from Germany, and why; at what cost; how they are to be transported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The first battalion of the Prince of Wales Own Regiment are taking their own Warrior armoured vehicles with them and the first battalion of the Cheshire Regiment will return with their Warriors to Germany. The vehicles will be transported by ship. The cost of changing the vehicles is estimated at £300,000. The changeover is being done in order to spread the high mileage and very significant wear arising from operations in Bosnia across the fleet as a whole, thereby maintaining the best engineering management and reducing overall long-term costs to a minimum.

Tornados

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column 242, if he will categorise by rank and specialisation the 227 ground personnel deployed with the six Tornados and two VC-10s to enforce the no-fly zone.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The 227 ground personnel were in support of the Tornados at Gioia del Colle; in addition there were 41 ground personnel deployed in support of the VC10 tankers at Sigonella. The 268 personnel are categorised as follows:

	Officers	*Senior NCOs*	*Airmen*	*Total*
Operations Support	7	2	2	11
Engineering and Supply	6	55	152	213
Administrative and catering	5	7	32	44
TOTAL	18	64	186	268

Drug Tests (Armed Forces)

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to introduce random drug tests for members of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The armed forces employ a range of measures to combat drug abuse. These measures are kept under review and the introduction of compulsory drug testing is an option we are considering.

Hunting

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on whose authority licences are issued to hunt on Ministry of Defence land; and how the terms and conditions of the licences are drawn up.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Licences are issued under the authority of the Secretary of State for Defence. The licences are different for each hunt to take into account the special needs of the host establishment.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Surrey Union hunt was first issued with a licence to hunt on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 7 October 1991.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Army personnel were permitted to participate in cub hunting in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Army personnel from mounted units, and those involved in their training, are permitted to take part in a range of equestrian training activities, including cub hunting.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the terms and conditions of hunt licences permit any hunt to block up badger setts or permit the digging out of foxes on Ministry of Defence land;

(2) if he will make it his policy to include in any licences for hunting on Ministry of Defence land a requirement that the rules set out in the rules of the Masters of Foxhounds Association be adhered to.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which hunts currently have a licence to hunt on Ministry of Defence land and in which areas; and when these licences are due for renewal.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The licences to hunt issued by my Department are due for renewal at various times. The hunts which had licences for the 1992-93 season were:

Brecon Farmers Hunt—Sennybridge Training Area
Sennybridge Farmers Hunt—Sennybridge Training Area
Irfon and Towey Hunt—Sennybridge Training Area
Glyn Celyn Beagles—Sennybridge Training Area
Blankney Hunt—Fulbeck and Beckingham Training Area
Surrey Union Hunt—Aldershot Military lands and Surrey Commons Training Area
West Shropshire Hunt—Nesscliffe Training Area
North Shropshire Hunt—Nesscliffe Training Area
Avon Vale Hunt—Salisbury Plain Training Area
South and West Wiltshire Hunt—Salisbury Plain Training Area
Royal Artillery Hunt—Salisbury Plain Training Area
Beaucaster Hunt—Spadeadam
Border Hunt—Otterburn Training Area
West Percy Hunt—Otterburn Training Area
Tynedale Hunt—Ouston Nr. Newcastle
Bedale Hunt—Catterick Training Area
Zetland Hunt—Feldom Training Area
Wensleydale Hunt—Catterick Training Area
West of York Hunt—Ellerton Banks
Catterick Beagles—Catterick Training Area
Newcastle Beagles—Otterburn Training Area

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all those fox hunts with which Ministry of Defence personnal are permitted to hunt in duty hours.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personnel who are permitted to take part in fox hunting during duty hours may do so with any fox hunt in the country if they have the permission of the hunt secretary.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the Queens Royal Irish Hussars have participated in fox hunting; and with which hunts, in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the cost of the licenses held by the HMS Heron sporting gun club were last increased; by what percentage; and for how many years the licenses have been held.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Heron sporting gun club has held a licence to shoot at Merryfield airfield since 1974 and at Langport range since 1986. The licences were last reviewed in 1991 and there was no increase in the charges.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to restrict the involvement of armed forces personnel in fox hunting during duty hours.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personnel from mounted units, and those involved in their training, are permitted to take part in fox hunting in duty hours at the commanding officer's discretion when it is not to the detriment of any other military task. Other personnel are not normally permitted to hunt during duty hours. No further restrictions are planned.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any charge is made for Army personnel to use Army horses and equipment to hunt in off-duty hours; and on how many occasions Army personnel from non-mounted units have been permitted to hunt in duty hours in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Army personnel from mounted units, and those involved in their training, are not permitted to use Army horses or equipment to hunt in off-duty hours. Army personnel from non-mounted units are required to pay for the hire of Army horses to hunt in off-duty hours. They would normally provide their own equipment.

Figures showing the number of occasions on which Army personnel from non-mounted units have been permitted to hunt in duty hours in 1991, 1992, and 1993 could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether cub hunting is permitted on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Shooting Rights

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *14*, whether the Bulford and Tidworth garrison shoot is permitted to sell shooting days; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Flying Training

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage decrease or increase in the provision for Royal Air Force flying training activity in 1991-92 over 1990-91; and what changes in provision are being implemented this year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The tasked flying hours for 1991-92 showed a decrease of 3 per cent. over 1990-91. Tasked flying hours for 1993-94 are yet to be finalised.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the listed buildings currently owned by his Ministry; which he intends to sell; how many have been sold in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following properties are currently for sale: Inverary pier, Faslane; Royal Marine barracks, Eastney; 28A Colliergate drill hall, York; former officers' mess, Maidstone; Forthside house, Stirling; Penisula barracks, Winchester and Bawdsey manor.

In addition, we are disposing of Royal William yard and Mount Batten tower in Plymouth which will be transferred to the Plymouth urban development corporation and Paterchurch tower, Pembroke dock which will be transferred to Pembrokeshire district council.

Other listed buildings have been indentified as possibilities for sale but have not yet been placed on the market. We intend, however, to review systematically all our historic buildings to determine which should be retained by the Ministry of Defence, in their current or alternative use, and which should be disposed of expeditiously to ensure their preservation by finding a suitable alternative use.

Information on sales in the last five years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Hydrographic Service

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the work of the British Hydrographic Service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom Hydrographic Service is made up of four elements: the Ministry of Defence Hydrographic Department, which is responsible for operational policy on surveying and for planning defence and civil surveys; the Royal Navy Hydrographic Surveying Squadron, which conducts United Kingdom defence surveys and part of the civil survey task; the Ministry of Defence Hydrographic Office Defence Agency, which is responsible for the production of the British Admiralty charts and publications and other professional services to the Ministry of Defence; and the Royal Navy Hydrographic School, where Royal Navy and Foreign and Commonwealth students are given courses accredited by the International Hydrographic Organisation.

The detailed work of all these elements is summarised in the annual report of the Hydrographer of the Navy, which is laid before Parliament and copies of which are placed in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current and projected future cost of the British Hydrographic Service; and what is the current and proposed future establishment of the service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown by size and category of the number of vessels currently operated by the British Hydrographic Service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Hydrographic Survey Squadron currently consists of two ocean survey vessels of some 2,500 tonnes; three coastal survey vessels of between 1,400 and 1,100 tonnes; and one inshore survey craft of some 20 tonnes. In addition, the Hydrographic Survey Squadron operates two chartered vessels to undertake civil hydrographic surveys.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the revenue generated in each

of the last 10 years by sales of charts and related information by the British hydrographic service *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* to overseas customers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. A. L. Myres to Mr. Nicholas Winterton, dated 5 May 1993:

1. You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question concerning the revenue generated in each of the last 10 years by sales of charts and related information by the British Hydrographic Service *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* to overseas customers.

2. The Minister has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office, to reply directly to you. The information you require can be found in the attached Annex. In amplification I should like to make two observations. Firstly, the term "charts and related information" has been defined as the sale of charts and hydrographic publications. Secondly, the revenue figures are, for reasons of comparison, expressed on a constant price basis, namely at 1992-93 prices.

3. I should also point out that charts and hydrographic publications are sold through a worldwide network of Admiralty Chart Agents. Whilst we have, on the basis of our invoice returns, been able to differentiate between sales to UK and overseas chart agents, it does not follow that an overseas chart agent will sell only to a user based overseas or vice versa.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex

£ million

Financial Year	*United Kingdom (1at 1992-93 prices)*	*Overseas (1at 1992-93 prices)*
1982-83	7·08	9·38
1983-84	6·91	8·44
1984-85	7·08	8·66
1985-86	5·98	7·91
1986-87	6·22	7·91
1987-88	6·13	8·12
1988-89	6·28	8·79
1989-90	6·77	9·45
1990-91	7·04	10·65
1991-92	8·60	11·11
1992-93	7·58	10·98

[1] Calculated using HM Treasury GDP deflator index dated February 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to withdraw vessels operated by the British hydrographic service and for the replacement of such vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current ships of the Hydrographic survey squadron will be replaced, as this becomes necessary, with chartered vessels with naval crews or parties embarked as appropriate.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to use members of the reserve forces in support of current operations.

Mr. Rifkind: I reported to the House by notice last October the call-out of a small number of willing officers of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve to support current operations, and in November the Minister of State for the Armed Forces reported the call-out of a number of Territorial Army and Royal Naval personnel.

A need for futher limited support from the reserve forces has now arisen. The requirement is for a small number of officers to serve in Italy in intelligence and public relations capacities in support of the operations to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia. Three officers will be deployed at any one time and additional support may be needed in the United Kingdom. They will all be volunteers. They are being called out under section 11(1) of the Reserve Forces Act 1980.

TRANSPORT

Fords

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fords there are in England where public roads cross watercourses; how many fatal or serious accidents have occurred in each of the last 10 years as a result of vehicles failing to negotiate water on fords on public roads; if he will list fords which have been closed to traffic following such accidents; and what is his Department's policy towards fords and the provision of warning to motorists when water conditions may be dangerous.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No information is available centrally about the number of fords in England, accidents at or near fords, or fords which have been closed to traffic following accidents. Fords are normally on minor roads which are the responsibility of the local authority. The signs prescribed in Traffic Signs Regulations for use as necessary include triangular signs to give advance warning of the ford and the need to try brakes after crossing, gauges to show the depth of water and "Unsuitable for motors" plates for use with the warning signs where the water is normally too deep. Warning signs can be used where floods occur at fairly regular intervals but should be covered or removed unless the hazard is present.

Sonic Booms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many sonic booms have been reported over land areas of the United Kingdom in each year since 1987; and how many of these were caused by *(a)* military aircraft and *(b)* civil aircraft.

Mr. Norris: We have received no reports of primary sonic booms over the UK from the operation of civil aircraft since 1987.

I have asked my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence to write to the hon. Member about military aircraft.

Exeter-Barnstaple Rail Line

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the future funding of the Exeter to Barnstaple railway line.

Mr. Freeman: Services which meet an essential social need will continue to receive a subsidy where necessary. This applies whether the operator is a franchisee or BR, which will continue to operate services until they are franchised.

Plutonium Transport

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter dated 15 March by the Minister for Aviation and Shipping to Lord Jenkins of Putney on comparative risks of plutonium transport.

Mr. Norris: Yes, I have done so.

General Lighthouse Fund

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change will be made in the funding of the general lighthouse fund following the transfer of responsibility for this service from Her Majesty's Customs.

Mr. Norris: The General Lighthouse Authorities, with the agreement of the Department of Transport, have entered into a contract with the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers to collect the majority of light dues. The contract came into operation of 1 April 1993 and did not involve any changes to the operation of the General Lighthouse Fund.

Bus Subsidies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total amount of subsidy to bus operations in each of the past 20 years.

Mr Freeman: The information requested is shown in the table. Revenue support figures for the years prior to 1977-78 are not shown as they could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Grants and subsidies to the bus industry: Great Britain

£ million[1]

Year	*Revenue support*	*Fuel duty rebate*	*Rural bus grant*	*New bus grant*	*Infra-structure grant*	*Total*
1972-73	—	21	1	20	1	—
1973-74	—	20	1	21	1	—
1974-75	—	36	3	23	2	—
1975-76	—	39	4	37	2	—
1976-77	—	47	—	41	2	—
1977-78	196	57	—	49	1	303
1978-79	220	59	—	57	1	337
1979-80	264	67	—	66	—	397
1980-81	373	80	—	74	—	527
1981-82	443	89	—	58	—	590
1982-83	561	103	—	30	—	694
1983-84	572	101	—	16	—	689
1984-85	608	127	—	1	—	736
1985-86	495	131	—	—	—	626
1986-87	419	129	17	—	—	565
1987-88	337	135	17	—	—	489
1988-89	337	158	13	—	—	508
1989-90	296	150	4	—	—	450
1990-91[1]	323	169	—	—	—	492
1991-92[2]	377	189	—	—	—	566

[1] Not adjusted for inflation
[2] Provisional
Sources: Bus and Coach Statistics 1991-92, HMSO
Transport Statistics Great Britain, HMSO

Road Crashes

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress in the reduction of deaths and serious injuries from road crashes in the north west region.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of people killed and seriously injured on north west roads in 1991 was 5,580. This is 21 per cent. lower than the annual average 1981-85 base figure, against which we are measuring our target of reducing the number of road casualties by one-third by the year 2000.

Roadworks

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the application of higher safety standards to protect workers engaged in highway repairs has increased the number and length of lane closures at roadworks *(a)* generally, and *(b)* between junction 28 and 29 on the M1.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The current standards for safety zones have been in force for many years, although compliance may have improved following publication of the revised chapter 8 of the Department's traffic signs manual in May 1991. The number and length of lane closures have depended on the maintenance requirements at any particular time, and the volume of traffic which had to be accommodated in the open lanes.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department take where motorway repairs and improvements are done under lane rental contracts to prevent excessive delays caused by long sections of road being affected at any one time.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Lane rental provides a particular incentive for contractors to minimise the duration of lane closures, but all our motorway repairs and improvements are carefully planned and co-ordinated to minimise delays to road users, regardless of the form of contract used. We normally require that roadworks on motorways be spaced at least 10 km apart, and our contractors are instructed that no more than 4 km of carriageway should be coned off

on any scheme at any time. Traffic management layouts are individually designed, and techniques continuously refined, to maximise the capacity of the lanes available and smooth the flow of traffic through the works.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the length of delays to traffic at the roadworks between junctions 28 and 29 on the M1 motorway currently taking place; and what steps can be taken to reduce them.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Major maintenance, including strengthening and resurfacing, is necessary to the M1 between junctions 28 and 29 in Derbyshire. Lane restrictions are an essential safety measure to protect the workforce and road users. This section of the M1 carries 90,000 vehicles a day. With that level of traffic, lane restrictions will unfortunately cause a degree of disruption, particularly at peak times. To mitigate the effect on traffic, the work is being carried out under a lane rental contract which allows the contractor to work throughout the day and night, seven days a week, to encourage early completion. Through the national and local media road users have been kept advised of the work, so that they can consider making alternative arrangements if that is possible. I am, of course, sorry for the inconvenience that has been caused to people using this part of the M1, but the work is programmed for completion on 20 May.

Environmental Impact

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to introduce on the environmental impact of transport in the north west region.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All major transport infrastructure proposals, in the north-west and elsewhere, are subject to full environmental impact assessment.

The March Budget announced that the value of fuel duty in real terms is to be increased as part of a strategy to increase fuel efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions. My Department is working closely with our European partners to tighten standards for noise and gaseous emissions from vehicles.

Traffic, Greater Manchester

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will visit the Greater Manchester area to assess the effect of traffic on town centres.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I shall be happy to visit Greater Manchester when the opportunity arises.

We have several major schemes in our trunk road programme which are designed to take traffic away from town centres in Greater Manchester. We are also supporting local authority road schemes and public transport projects such as Metrolink to help traffic conditions in the centres.

Bus Travelcards

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many urban areas all bus travelcard systems have been withdrawn or disagreed by operators since 1985.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected centrally. However, in all the major metropolitan areas there are at present travelcard schemes involving all the major bus operators.

LGV and PSV Drivers

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now make it his policy to initiate a registration scheme for qualified and experienced LGV and PSV instructors at an early date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 17 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *161*.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the standards of tuition given by unqualified LGV and PSV instructors and the numbers of liquidations of firms of unqualified instructors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have received no recent representations on these particular topics. My Department has no information about the number of liquidations of large goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle instruction firms.

Rail Privatisation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to his statement on 2 February, *Official Report*, column 243, that under the proposed rail franchising arrangement there should be a cap for those services that are a monopoly, at what level above the existing fares the cap will be set; and what the criteria will be for bringing the cap into effect;

(2) to what extent his policy on the guidance he will be issuing to the rail franchising authority as to the circumstances in which, and the extent to which, fares might be controlled has been developed beyond what is said in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the Railways Bill Committee paper No. 3 of February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Further work remains to be done in developing the draft guidance that I provided to the Standing Committee in relation to fares regulation and other matters.

Emergency Telephone (A2)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on his plans to instal emergency telephones on the A2 as it passes through the Dartford constituency.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Emergency telephones are to be installed on the A2 between Bexley and Three Crutches (M2). Consultants were appointed in January this year and it is hoped that installation work will start in spring next year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets for performance set by his Department for the Benefits Agency in respect of clearance

time and accuracy are reduced for 1993-94 relative to the original targets for 1992-93; what are the estimated final figures for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: There are four targets which have been reduced for 1993-94.

	1992-93 per cent.	*1993-94 per cent.*
DLA clearance time (in 55 days)	95	85
DWA clearance time (in 5 days)	95	65
IS accuracy	94	92
Family credit accuracy	94	92

The final performance figures for 1992-93 will be published in the Benefits Agency annual report in July 1993. The 1993-94 targets will be reviewed, as is customary, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the light of those figures.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost to the Exchequer to date of weekend working by staff of the Benefits Agency during the past 18 months at time-and-a-half and double-time, plus travelling expenses, for the purpose of making-up the backlog of disability living allowance cases.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 4 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what is the total cost to the Exchequer to date of weekend working by staff of the Benefits Agency during the past 18 months at time-and-a-half and double-time, plus travelling expenses, for the purpose of making-up the backlog of Disability Living Allowance cases.

Firstly, it may be helpful for me to explain that Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was introduced on 3 February 1992 and due to this fact any overtime worked prior to this date was mainly in respect of project work and not directly related to processing claims. The information I have therefore supplied, is relevant to the period when DLA was introduced.

It is not possible to establish how much overtime has been paid in respect of weekend working as the information is not recorded separately from normal after hours working. However, the total amount of overtime, including travelling time, in the period February 1992 to February 1993 was £6,822,583. This figure also includes work carried out in the Disability Benefit Centres which is attributable to other work areas and cannot be identified separately, for example Attendance Allowance.

Turning now to the question of travelling expenses this data is not available as it is not recorded separately from the normal travelling expenses incurred during everyday duties.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost to the Exchequer to date of providing staff of the Benefits Agency with corporate clothing; what this corporate clothing consists of; and how many sets of such clothing have been provided to date.

Mr. Burt: The provision of corporate clothing to Benefits Agency staff is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 4 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what is the total cost to the Exchequer to date of providing staff of the Benefits Agency with corporate clothing; what this corporate clothing consists of; and how many sets of such clothing have been provided to date.

Corporate clothing, as part of the customer service initiative, enables Benefits Agency staff to present a better and more professional image to their customers. This clothing is worn, voluntarily, by staff who deal regularly with the public such as receptionists, Social Fund officers and those members of staff running exhibitions and talks for outside bodies.

The corporate dress contract was awarded on 11 December 1991. The national cost of corporate clothing, for the financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93, is in the region of £2·1 million. I should explain that funding for this clothing comes from office running costs and not out of the budgets allocated to benefits.

The items available as corporate clothing include jackets, shirts, blouses, cardigans, jumpers, trousers, ties, maternity dresses, and belts. The clothing does not come in sets, but the average order would be in the range of 10 items. Over 86,000 individual items have been ordered to date.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Pension Age

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update table 6, at page 49 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age" to reflect current retirement pension rates.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the table. As in table 6 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age", the amounts are rounded to the nearest £1.

Basic pension available at different ages (£)

Age	*Age 63 'pivot'*	*Age 65 'pivot'*
60	45	39
61	48	41
62	52	45
63	56	48
64	61	52
65	66	56
66	71	61
67	77	66
68	84	72
69	92	79
70	102	87

Source: GAD, assumes prices uprating and single person's pension rates.

Water Prices

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to take into account disparities between water prices in different regions of the United Kingdom when structuring the benefits system.

Mr. Burt: Social security in the United Kingdom is composed largely of national benefits. We have no plans to change this arrangement.

Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost that would be involved in extending inflation-proofed pensions to those over 80 years of age who do not qualify for annual uprating, assuming the same age profile for such British state retirement pensioners as for those who do.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the numbers of British state retirement pensioners with ancestral links with new Commonwealth countries who would wish to spend their retirement in a new Commonwealth country if their entitlement to an inflation-proofed state retirement pensions were to be maintained.

Miss Widdecombe: The nationality or origin of a contributor to the British national insurance scheme is not recorded and we do not, therefore, have the information needed to make such an estimate.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those countries where British pensioners receive inflation-proofed state retirement pensions together with the dates when, in each case reciprocal agreements were entered into.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the table.

Table of overseas countries where annual pension increases are paid and the dates on which reciprocal social security agreements came into force

Country	*Date*
Austria	1 October 1972
Barbados	1 April 1992
Belgium	1 June 1958
Bermuda	1 November 1969
Cyprus	18 May 1957
Denmark[1]	8 February 1960
Finland	1 February 1984
France	5 July 1948
Germany	1 August 1961
Gibraltar	26 March 1974
Guernsey	4 April 1966
Iceland	1 August 1985
Irish Republic	4 April 1966
Israel	1 November 1957
Italy	1 May 1953
Jamaica	1 October 1972
Jersey	4 April 1966
Luxembourg	1 April 1955
Malta	29 October 1956
Mauritius	1 November 1981
Netherlands	1 June 1955
Norway	1 April 1991
Philippines	1 December 1989
Portugal	1 October 1979
Spain	1 April 1975
Sweden	1 May 1988
Switzerland	1 June 1954
Turkey	1 June 1961
United States of America	25 September 1969
Yugoslavia (including the newly independent former republics)	1 September 1958

Annual pension increases are also payable in Greece under the European Community's Social Security regulations.

[1]The reciprocal agreement between the United Kingdom and Denmark does not provide for annual pension increases to be paid to pensioners in Denmark but such increases are payable under the European Community's Social Security regulations.

Agencies (Letters)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 30 March, *Official Report*, column 172, for what purpose copies of letters from chief executives of agencies within his responsibility are sent to Ministers before being sent to the hon. Members to whom they are addressed; and how many such letters have been amended as a result of this practice.

Miss Widdecombe: Replying to parliamentary questions concerning day-to-day operational matters for which they are responsible has been delegated to the chief executive of this Department's Agencies in line with the Government's response to the Eighth Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee (October 1990, Cm 1263). The arrangements are kept under review. In this Department Ministers see a draft of chief executives' replies to remain informed of the actions and replies of the agencies concerned. It is not the practice of Ministers to amend such drafts.

Free Envelopes

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy regarding the supply of free envelopes to facilitate claims for benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The supply of free envelopes is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Hanson, dated 5 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what is his Department's policy regarding the supply of free envelopes to facilitate claims for benefits.

In line with the Benefits Agency's core value of Customer Service it is normal practice for officers to provide pre-paid envelopes when requesting information from a customer.

I am aware that there have been isolated instances where the facility of free envelopes has been withdrawn at a local level, but this has only been where it was felt that the money could be used more constructively in providing a better standard of service to our customers. Such decisions are only made where the District Manager is satisfied that the service to the customer will not suffer, and the decision is kept under constant review. I am currently reviewing these exceptions with a view to deciding whether they are justified. I will make a decision and write to you further at that time.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Residential and Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will ensure that, where there is no opposition from clients, the Benefits Agency provides assessment information to local authority social services departments, for the purposes of establishing residential care charges;

(2) what guidance he has issued to ensure co-operation between Benefits Agency staff and social services departments for the introduction of community care.

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 4 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking (i) if he will ensure that, where there is no opposition from clients, the Benefits Agency provides assessment information to local authority social services departments, for the purposes of establishing residential care charges and (ii) what guidance has been issued to ensure co-operation between Benefits Agency staff and social services departments, for the introduction of community care.

The Benefits Agency has made a number of arrangements to ensure adequate liaison with social services departments. The Departments of Health and of Social Security, the Benefits Agency and the Local Authority Associations (who represent all local authorities), have all been fully involved in the discussions on the introduction of community care. A joint statement of intent was issued in March 1993 to all Benefits Agency offices and Social Services departments (Social Work departments in Scotland). This detailed a number of good liaison practises and stressed the importance of effective communication.

Additionally, guidance has been issued nationally instructing staff in Benefits Agency offices to co-operate with all reasonable requests for information which social services departments may make, provided that the customers' consent has been obtained. Each Benefits Agency District has also appointed a member of staff with responsibility for liaising with their local Social Services or Social Work department.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Borders Structure Plan

16. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to make a statement following his consultations on the draft borders structure plan.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend will announce his conclusions on the borders structure plan as soon as he has fully considered all the objections to his draft modifications.

Public Expenditure

17. **Dr. Liam Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of public expenditure per head in Scotland in the current year.

Mr. Stewart: Latest available figures for public expenditure per head in Scotland relate to 1991-92. In that year the level of identifiable general government expenditure per head in Scotland was £3,506. Identifiable general government expenditure comprises expenditure identified as being of direct benefit to Scottish inhabitants. Other expenditure, principally on defence, is of equal benefit to all the inhabitants of the United Kingdom. That amounted to £716 per head across the United Kingdom in 1991-92.

Water Investment

18. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much additional borrowing is planned to be required for water investment over the next three years under existing financing arrangements.

Sir Hector Monro: Control of local authority capital investment is exercised over expenditure rather than borrowing. Expenditure provision for water and sewerage is £237 million in 1993-94, £243 million in 1994-95, and £248 million in 1995-96, a total of £728 million.

Local Enterprise Companies

19. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairs of local enterprise companies to discuss their business plans.

Mr. Stewart: The contractual relationship to which business plans are relevant is between local enterprise companies and Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Consequently, although my right hon. Friend and I meet chairmen of local enterprise companies from time to time to discuss a range of economic development and training issues, our discussions are not specifically related to their business plans.

Farmed Salmon

20. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for regulating the production of farmed salmon in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: I have welcomed the salmon farming industry's proposals to establish producer organisations. These will help create a more stable and better informed market. However, I do not accept the industry's case for giving such organisations compulsory powers to determine stock levels and minimum prices both for members and non-members.

Reservoirs (Public Access)

21. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on public access to reservoirs for recreational purposes.

Sir Hector Monro: Public access to reservoirs for recreational purposes is a matter for regional and islands councils as water authorities. The Scottish Office Environment Department will shortly be publishing a voluntary code of practice on conservation, access and recreation to guide the work of water authorities and river purification boards, prepared with their full co-operation.

Hospital Treatments

22. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients were treated in national health service hospitals in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figures were in 1979.

Mr. Stewart: A total of 933,624 patients were treated as in-patients in national health service hospitals in Scotland in the year ending 30 September 1992 compared with 735,583 in 1979—a 27 per cent. increase. Out-patients rose to 6,013,929 in 1992 from 5,202,863 in 1979. The most

significant increase occurred in the numbers of patients treated as day cases—up to 229,222 in 1992 a 180 per cent. increase on the 81,577 recorded in 1979.

Hospitals (Glasgow)

23. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with Greater Glasgow health board regarding the future of Glasgow hospitals, particularly Stobhill hospital.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent discussions with Greater Glasgow health board regarding their comprehensive review of acute and maternity services. He looks forward to receiving the board's detailed proposals in due course.

Dutch Elm Disease

24. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to prevent the spread of Dutch elm disease.

Sir Hector Monro: Dutch elm disease has already spread throughout Britain, apart from some parts of north Scotland. Legislation has been in place for many years giving local authorities powers to order the felling of diseased trees in certain areas where this would help to contain the disease. The Forestry Commission is continuing to investigate possible control methods, including a virus that attacks the fungus which causes the disease. It is also working on the development of disease resistant strains of English elm.

Water Privatisation

25. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the corresponding provisions in Northern Ireland when considering whether to privatise Scottish Water.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend and I maintain contact as appropriate with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has had from Conservative councillors on water privatisation.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has received 14 representations from Conservative councillors on the future structure of water and sewerage services in Scotland since 17 November last year.

Structural Funds

26. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with EC counterparts on structural funds' allocation *(a)* in general and *(b)* on objective 5(b) status for areas within Grampian regional council boundaries.

Mr. Stewart: Draft regulations have been published by the Commission and are under discussion in the structural actions working group of the Council of Ministers. Until the negotiations on criteria for the selection of objective 5(b) areas are further advanced it would be premature to discuss possible financial allocations to areas bidding for inclusion.

Crash Barriers

28. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of motorway and dual carriageway in Scotland do not have crash barriers installed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 19 miles of motorway and 106 miles of trunk road dual carriageway in Scotland without central reserve safety fencing. This represents approximately 10 per cent. of motorways and 33 per cent. of trunk road dual carriageways. A rolling programme is underway to install central reserve safety fencing on these remaining sections of the network by the end of the 1994-95 financial year.

Records are not kept centrally for non-trunk road dual carriageways, for which regional councils are responsible.

Rail Transport (Fife)

29. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future of rail transport in Fife.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the railways throughout Great Britain is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The provision of rail services in Fife is at present a matter for British Rail. Under the Government's proposals for the railways we believe that the direct involvement of the private sector will result in a better, more responsive service for the travelling public throughout Scotland including Fife.

Local Government Reform

27. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the Government's proposed time scale for introducing local government reform.

Mr. Stewart: We intend to announce our decisions on the future structure of local government in Scotland in a White Paper before the summer recess. Thereafter, subject to the necessary legislation being put in place, elections to shadow authorities will take place in spring 1995, with new authorities assuming full control on 1 April 1996.

30. **Sir Nicholas Fairbairn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now make a further statement on the reform of Scottish local government.

Mr. Stewart: More than 3,300 responses to the consultation exercise on local government reform were received from a wide range of organisations and individuals. These are currently being analysed and we intend to announce our decisions on the future structure of local government in Scotland in a White Paper before the summer recess.

38. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the cost of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Stewart: A move to a single-tier structure will give rise to transitional costs which should be quickly recovered by annual savings. An indication of the likely financial consequences of reform will be included in a White Paper on our restructuring proposals which we intend to publish before the summer recess.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to hold discussions regarding the cost of the reform of the Scottish local government system prior to the publication of the White Paper on this subject.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend will be consulting colleagues in the usual way before publishing his proposals for the reform of local government in Scotland.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his oral answer of 31 March, *Official Report*, column 349, on the cost of local Government reform, if he will hold discussions on the costs of reform with existing local authorities.

Mr. Stewart: My officials have already held useful discussions on the costs of reform with local authority representatives on the working party on local government finance. I have no plans at present to hold further discussions on the issue.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the names and qualifications of financial and management consultancies he intends to use to help the Scottish Office formulate the financial data required to produce a White Paper on Scottish local government reform;

(2) what plans he has to invite Touche Ross to tender for further work with the Scottish Office in connection with the reform of the local Government system in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The Scottish Office has no plans at present to commission further work from any consultants in connection with local government reform.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy, before publication of the White Paper on the reform of local Government in Scotland, to have discussions with representatives of industry and commerce in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: My colleagues and I meet regularly with representatives of industry and commerce in Scotland to discuss a range of current issues, including local government reform. Our consultation paper on local government reform generated about 220 responses from commercial and industrial organisations and these will be taken fully into account before decisions are reached on the new structure.

Museums

31. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on policy concerning museums.

Sir Hector Monro: Policy on museums in Scotland is developed and reviewed in consultation with interested organisations. In particular with the Museums and Galleries Commission, the Scottish Museums Council, and representatives of local authorities.

Ministry of Defence Spending

32. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the success of Scottish Enterprise in ensuring that Ministry of Defence spending is attracted to Scotland, Glasgow and Govan.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Enterprise's success in helping Scottish companies to respond to opportunities to secure contracts and in attracting new employment to Scotland is assessed in the round rather than in relation to any specific organisation. Scottish Enterprise's specific initiative to deal with the effects on the Scottish economy and labour market of changes in the defence sector also goes wider than seeking to maximise Ministry of Defence spending in Scotland; and assessment of that initiative is framed in appropriately broad terms to reflect its objectives.

Unemployment

33. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of unemployment in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: In March 1993, the level of unemployment in Scotland, seasonally adjusted, was 244,400 or 9·6 per cent. of the work force.

It is very encouraging that unemployment in Scotland has fallen for two successive months.

Hospital Building

34. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much capital expenditure has been allocated for the current year and 1994 for new hospital building projects in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: A total of £180·484 million was allocated for capital expenditure to health boards, trusts and the state hospital for 1993-94. This figure excludes moneys for information technology but includes amounts allocated for equipment and for the improvement of the existing estate. The allocations for financial year 1994-95 will only be decided at the end of the calendar year.

Student Grants

35. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Scottish Education Department will reconsider funding for courses affected by the change of status from college to university of certain institutions in Scotland in cases where students have been deprived of grants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland, responsiblity for the provision of student support is determined by the nature, level, and validation of the course concerned; not by the status of the institution offering it.

My right hon. Friend has no plans to change that arrangement.

Sunday Trading

36. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions he has drawn from experience of the practice of Sunday trading in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Over the years Sunday trading practices in Scotland have evolved in line with the wishes of the local communities. Sunday trading in Scotland occurs mainly in urban areas. It fulfils a need for some members of the public without seriously disadvantaging others. The present arrangements appear to work well and to the satisfaction of the great majority of the Scottish public.

New Towns

37. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of the Scottish new towns to discuss the future of the new towns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I met the chairmen and deputy chairmen of all the new town development corporations on 5 October 1992. I again met the chairmen collectively on 21 December 1992 and will meet the chairmen and board members of individual corporations during the summer months.

West Coast Main Line

39. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail concerning new investment on the west coast main line; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Rail from time to time. Such contacts cover a wide range of topics relating to rail services in Scotland.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the 1993-94 budget for each local enterprise company in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The allocation of resources to the local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was given to Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. for training in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94.

Mr. Stewart: The allocation of resources to the local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Opencast Coal

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will issue new interim guidance on opencast coal production, following the Bridgecastle case, to update circulars 4/1984 and 23/1987;

(2) at what stage he proposes to issue interim guidance on opencast coal production to supersede circulars 4/1984 and 23/1987.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* We do not propose to issue specific interim guidance on opencast coal production. We do, however, propose to issue a new National Planning Policy Guideline "Land for Mineral Working" later this year. This will embrace opencast coal mining, take account of the Coal Review White Paper, and supersede circulars 4/1984 and 23/1987.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 May 1993

TRANSPORT

Road Schemes

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report into speeding up pre-construction procedures for road schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend is concerned to speed up the delivery of schemes in the national road programme. He will make a statement about his plans as soon as possible.

Road Salt

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ban the use of sodium hexacyanoferrate in road salt.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The rock salt used on the Department's motorways and trunk roads complies with British standard 3247, which stipulates the use of an anti-caking agent. The anti-caking agent currently in use is sodium hexacyanoferrate and I have no plans to discontinue its use.

Seacroft-Crossgates Bypass

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that any decision on the Leeds A6120 Seacroft/Crossgates bypass should be postponed until a decision has been taken on the transpennine strategy study.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The transpennine study addresses wide strategic problems on the road network across the Pennines, whereas any proposals to improve the A6120 running through the communities of Seacroft and Crossgates would be designed to overcome existing traffic congestion and the bad accident record on the present road. It would be wrong therefore to tie the urgently needed improvements on the A6120 to the different and longer-term prospects for the transpennine routes.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what licences have been granted or issued for the transportation of radioactive materials to the THORP site since 1 January; and what applications are now under consideration by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: One package design approval has been issued: four others are under consideration.

Nuclear Weapons (Transport)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make public his secret emergency plans dealing with nuclear weapon transport accidents.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have no such plans. This is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Traffic Review, Meriden

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission a review of traffic through Meriden village since the closure of the Oak Lane junction with the A45; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We are undertaking a review of all the options for permanent improvement of the Oak Lane junction with the A45. This will take account of the present interim scheme and of local views. I will write to my hon. Friend when the review is complete.

Seat Belts (Buses)

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce compulsory seat belts for school buses and minibuses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There is presently no requirement to fit seat belts in the rear seats of minibuses and coaches except in the exposed forward facing seats in coaches first used after 1 October 1988. We are pressing the European Commission to put forward amendments to the relevant directives to require seat belts to be fitted to all seats in these vehicles. The present law on compulsory wearing of seat belts requires them to be used in rear, as well as front, seats of smaller minibuses with an unladen weight not exceeding 2540kg, where they are fitted voluntarily.

"The Loading Gauge Issue"

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the Eurotunnel-sponsored report entitled "The Loading Gauge Issue" published in January; what reply he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I received Eurotunnel's report directly it was published. Eurotunnel is involved in continuing discussions being held between my Department, Her Majesty's railways inspectorate, independent consultants and British Rail on the feasibility and costs of upgrading some of BR's existing lines to a gauge suitable for piggyback transport.

Plutonium Nitrate

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will request the safety and reliability directorate of AEA Technology to update the 1984 report SRD-R-244, on the radiological consequences of the release into the sea of the contents of a plutonium nitrate package.

Mr. Norris: I understand that the Atomic Energy Authority is reviewing the report.

MOD Vehicles (Licensing)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle types have been licensed by his Department under the International Atomic Energy Agency safety series No. 6 regulations 1985, as amended in 1990, for use by the Ministry of Defence for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No such licences are required.

Night Flights

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish a list of those airlines, airport owner/operators, local authorities, pressure groups and other similar organisations and bodies that have submitted observations on his proposals for new night flight controls at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports;

(2) how many representations he has received from members of the public on his proposals for new night flight controls at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

Mr. Norris: The numbers of responses received in the relevant division to date is as follows:—

17	Members of Parliament and MEPs (other than letters covering constituents' views);
3	Airport consultative committees
66	Local authorities, Parish and Town councils, and local authority organisations;
41	Environmental and other local groups;
2	Aviation and acoustical consultants
61	Airlines;
5	Airport and aviation bodies;
17	Airline and airport users;
1,823+	Responses from people living around Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted;
83	Responses from people living elsewhere;
2,762*	Petitions and signatures lodged in bulk.

\+ Relates to number of letters, not number of signatures.
* Numbers subject to verification.

Figures exclude correspondence related to proposed aircraft noise classifications. A list of the main respondents will be made available in due course.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish a list of those Governments with whom discussions have been held on the new aircraft type classification proposed in his consultation paper on new night flight controls at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports; and how many of such Governments have indicated their support;

(2) if he will make a statement on the outcome of the discussions with the United States Federal Aviation Authority on their willingness to accept the new aircraft type classification system proposed in his consultation paper on new night flight controls at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

Mr. Norris: The classification system is based on the noise certification data which all modern aircraft are required to possess to operate between states that are signatories of the Chicago convention. As stated in the consultation paper, the use of such data is being discussed with several European countries with the hope of evolving a common approach. These discussions are being conducted through regular contacts at normal aviation fora. The outcome of our present consultation in relation to Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted is not dependent on the outcome of these discussions.

Safe Seas

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has made to the European Commission on its proposal for setting up a committee on safe seas contained in the communication from Commissioners on "A Common Policy on Safe Seas"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom has warmly welcomed the Commission's communication "A Common Policy for Safe Seas", which closely mirrors the Government's views on the need for action to improve the level of maritime safety in Community waters. Along with other member states, we approve in principle the Commission's proposal for a committee on safe seas, and are currently considering what its terms of reference should be.

ENVIRONMENT

Revocation Orders

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total number of revocation orders issued by his Department following inappropriate planning decisions by local authorities in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: This power has been used only once in the last 10 years. The last occasion was in 1991.

Integrated Administration and Control Scheme

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for the Director General of Ordnance Survey to ensure *(a)* that all areas of United Kingdom farmland are mapped and *(b)* the establishment of an emergency Ordnance Survey telephone helpline to assist farmers experiencing mapping difficulties in completing their IACS forms.

Mr. Baldry: Ordnance Survey has surveyed and mapped all mountain and moorland areas of Great Britain at a scale of 1:10,000 and all other rural areas at a scale of 1:2,500. This mapping, which is based on the national grid and is available in a variety of forms, is maintained by Ordnance Survey, but is not commercially viable to revive the map of rural and remote areas as intensively as those of urban areas.

Some 400 outlets have been set up by Ordnance Survey to help farmers obtain the necessary maps and information to complete their IACS forms; these include Ordnance Surveys superplan agents, land agents who have been granted extended copyright licences for the purpose, Ordnance Survey's own field offices, the Welsh Office and ADAS in Wales and the Scottish agricultural college in Scotland. In addition, staff at Ordnance Survey headquarters in Southampton are answering over 200 telephone inquiries from farmers each day using sophisticated helpline facilities.

Timeshare

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how United Kingdom timeshare dwellings are to be treated for the purposes of council tax and business rates regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Timeshare accommodation is liable for non-domestic rates.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the status of timeshare dwellings to make them eligible for council tax and to remove them from business rates.

Mr. Robin Squire: None.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) of 28 April, *Official Report*, column 947, whether he will consider moving his Department to the Ark in Hammersmith.

Mr. Howard: I have asked Property Holdings, who are property managers for the Government estate, for advice on suitable accommodation. They are already fully aware of the availability of the Ark development and will take it into account.

Tyne and Wear Urban Development Corporation

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), *Official Report*, column *319*, how many of the jobs created by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation were relocations from other sites; how many of the jobs are being carried out by people living *(a)* within the urban development corporation area and *(b)* within two miles of the urban development corporation area; and what has been the total amount spent by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation since its inception.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information as requested relating to jobs created by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation is not available. The corporation does, however, in conjunction with the local training and enterprise councils, encourage employers to recruit people from the local community.

The total amount spent by the corporation to 31 March 1993, including receipts, was £212·17 million.

Chemical Industry

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the process definitions set out in the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991 as they apply to the chemical industry.

Mr. Maclean: I met representatives of the Chemical Industries Association on 24 February to discuss the industry's concern that the process definitions set out in the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991 do not adequately reflect the complexity of the chemical industry. The industry believes that problems of process definition will result in unreasonable uncertainty and excessive cost for the industry in applying for authorisations under integrated pollution control and will delay the authorisation process.

At the meeting, I promised the industry that we would consider sympathetically the details of their concerns and take measures to overcome them. Since then, a small working party comprising representatives of the industry and of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has been looking into this problem.

Companies within this sector are due to be brought within integrated pollution control this year; the window for applications for authorisation of such process runs from 1 May to 31 July. In order to avoid the need for applications to be submitted before the detailed outcome of these considerations is known, I propose to extend the application window until 31 October. Amending regulations to that effect will be laid in the very near future.

I am satisfied that extending the application window in this way will not lead to any weakening in environmental protection, and believe that the operation of integrated pollution control can be improved by making limited changes to the definition of processes in the manufacture and use of organic chemicals falling under section 4.2 of chapter 4 of the regulations. These changes are not expected to affect other industrial sectors or processes subject to local authority air pollution control or to cut across possible changes that may arise from the wider consultation we are currently undertaking in relation to the 1991 regulations.

Estate Action

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the percentage of the total housing investment programme and resources allocated to estate action in each year since 1986-87.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* Under the local authority capital finance system established in 1990-91, housing investment programme allocations represent an assessment of the relative need for housing capital expenditure, rather than a direct borrowing approval. Borrowing approval is conveyed by the single, all-service basic credit approval, augmented by allocations of supplementary credit approvals, where appropriate. In turn, local authorities finance their housing investment programmes from credit approvals and grant, from usable capital receipts, and from contributions from revenue budgets.

The table shows the resources allocated to the estate action programme each year since 1986-87, in total and as a percentage of total local authority housing capital allocations.

	Estate action resources (£ million)	*Estate action resources as a percentage of local authority housing capital allocations*
1986-87	45	3
1987-88	75	5
1988-89	140	9
1989-90	190	13
1990-91	190	10
1991-92	268	13
1992-93	347	[1]18
1993-94	356	[2]20

[1] estimated outturn
[2] plans

Homelessness

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the choice provided by local authorities to homeless families when they are moved on from one unit of temporary accommodation to another type of temporary accommodation.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held centrally.

Seveso Directive

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 26, April to the hon. and Learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile),

Official Report, column *322*, if he will list the bodies and people who will receive copies of the consultation document on extending the scope of the Seveso directive.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The proposed amending regulations to extend the scope of the Seveso directive will apply to only approximately 10 waste disposal installations in the United Kingdom. Consultation with the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors has already begun. Further consultation will take place through the Health and Safety Commission's advisory committee on dangerous substances, which includes representatives from the CBI, TUC and local authority associations such as the Association of District Councils and Association of County Councils. Other interested bodies will be alerted through a press release which will advise how copies of the consultation document can be obtained.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to make provisions for overseas domestic workers to be granted leave to remain while they pursue legal action, civil or criminal, against former employers;

(2) what plans he has of giving overseas domestic workers an immigration status *(a)* independent of the household they work for and *(b)* as workers;

(3) what plans he has to establish a review of the present laws regulating the admission of overseas domestic workers; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what plans there are to allow overseas domestic workers to change employers within the same category of employment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We introduced in May 1991 tighter criteria for the exceptional arrangements outside the immigration rules under which a domestic servant who has worked abroad for an employer who comes to the United Kingdom may be admitted to continue working for that employer. Although domestic workers are admitted to keep their jobs as part of the household of their employer, they have their own immigration status as employees and may apply for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom after four years in approved employment under the exceptional arrangements. There are no provisions under those arrangements for domestic workers to change employers outside the immigration rules before being granted indefinite leave to remain. Nor is there provision for any non-EC national to remain in the United Kingdom after his or her leave has expired in order to pursue legal action. However, each case involving a domestic worker who wishes to remain in the United Kingdom after having left the employer for whom he or she was admitted to work is carefully considered before any enforcement action is taken, and account is taken of any compassionate circumstances. We have no plans to carry out a further review of the arrangements for domestic workers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on how many overseas domestic workers have initiated legal challenges against their former employers since 24 July 1990 on grounds of *(a)* sexual offences, *(b)* offences of violence, *(c)* false imprisonment, *(d)* assault and battery, *(e)* intimidation, *(f)* breach of contract and *(g)* slavery; and how many such employers were found guilty.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received with regard to reforming the immigration status of overseas domestic workers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Since the beginning of this year, my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received four lettters from right hon. and hon. Members and noble Lords about the exceptional arrangements outside the immigration rules for domestic workers from overseas. My right hon. and learned Friend and I have also received a number of letters from members of the public and organisations.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic workers have entered the United Kingdom since 1977; and if he will specify those entering under *(a)* code 4, *(b)* code 5N and *(c)* code 3 of the immigration regulations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is not available in the form requested. However, in the period January to August 1992, some 8,600 entry clearances were issued to domestic workers by the main posts which issue entry clearances to such workers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the number of domestic workers deported since 1980; and how many were *(a)* overstayers or *(b)* unauthorised workers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Life Sentences

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the reconviction rate for people released from prison on licence who were serving life sentences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Two per cent. of life licensees released between 1972 and 1988 were convicted of a "grave" offence—violent crime—within two years of discharge and 4 per cent. of those persons released between 1972 and 1985 were reconvicted within five years. The figures for a "standard list" offence—indictable plus certain summary offences—were 10 and 21 per cent respectively. This information was published in statistical bulletin 3/93, a copy of which is in the Library.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's policy for financing and supporting crime prevention.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on 4 March, at columns *274-75*, which

details Home Office support for crime prevention. In addition, other Departments' programmes, such as the Department of the Environment's city challenge and estates action, and the Department for Education's grants for education support and training scheme, include strong crime prevention elements. Overall Government spending on crime prevention was an estimated £167 million in 1991-92.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the working so far of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We remain committed to the Act's objective of improving public protection against attacks from fighting and other dogs. We continue to keep the Act's operation under review, and to consider suggestions for further improvement to its practical operations.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to ensure that the distinction between pit bull terriers and Staffordshire bull terriers is clear.

Mr. Jack: We have no plans to amend the Act. Periodic advice has been issued to the enforcement authorities and the courts on the identification of dogs, and we are considering suggestions for providing further help on this point.

Identity Cards

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about a national identity card scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Some 27 individual letters have been received from Members of Parliament and others so far this year. None has persuaded me that the advantages of such a scheme outweigh the disadvantages.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support his Department gives to assist neighbourhood watch schemes.

Mr. Jack: The Government are committed to encouraging the development of neighbourhood watch schemes. The number of schemes has grown rapidly in recent years and there are now nearly 115,000 schemes in operation in England and Wales covering more than 5 million households.

We set up Crime Concern in 1988 to stimulate growth of schemes and develop a national structure for the neighbourhood watch movement. We have provided considerable financial backing to enable Crime Concern to carry forward this work.

We have recently given funding towards the cost of producing a neighbourhood watch co-ordinator's handbook which is shortly to be published. A number of national conferences for scheme co-ordinators have been arranged by Crime Concern. Last year's conference took place at the national exhibition centre in Birmingham and was addressed by the Home Secretary.

With financial support from the Home Office, Crime Concern is also undertaking a two year pilot project, the "neighbourhood safety project", to introduce a neighbourhood watch-type scheme into two high crime residential areas in West Yorkshire.

We are including a special neighbourhood watch insert in the Home Office magazine "Crime Prevention News" which is sent to all police crime prevention officers for distribution to neighbourhood watch co-ordinators.

We encourage the police to support neighbourhood watch schemes, although it is ultimately a matter for each chief constable to decide how much of his resources he can allocate to these activities. I addressed the Derby neighbourhood watch co-ordinators' conference on 30 April and I was delighted to learn about the considerable support which Derbyshire police are providing to schemes throughout the force area.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cambodia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *148*, and his pursuant answer of 29 April column *506*, what information he has on the number of mines lifted by the Cambodians trained or operating under UNTAC in Cambodia.

Mr. Goodlad: According to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia—UNTAC—figures at mid-April, Cambodians trained by UNTAC have destroyed or recovered 14,343 mines and munitions in Cambodia—9,474 anti-personnel mines, 20 anti-tank mines and 4,869 pieces of unexploded ordinance. By comparison, non-governmental organisations have cleared 2,171 mines and munitions.

World Conflict

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretry of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current armed conflicts in the world, the estimated number of deaths in each and the actions taken by the United Kingdom Government to encourage peace in each conflict.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Earlier this year the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros-Ghali, told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that the United Nations was currently seized of 25 conflicts around the world. Detailed information on all these conflicts is not centrally recorded and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. However, 12 of these conflicts are the object of a United Nations peacekeeping operation to which Britain as a permanent member of the Security Council makes its due contribution. They are: India/Pakistan, Lebanon, Israel/Syria and Jerusalem, Cyprus, Cambodia, former Yugoslavia, Iran/Kuwait, El Salvador, Western Sahara, Angola, Somalia and Mozambique.

Ukraine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 14 April, to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), *Official Report*, column 830, if he will set out the reasons why Her Majesty's Government regard it as a

disastrous mistake by the Ukranian Parliament to hold the view that the Ukraine should not relinquish the nuclear weapons held by Ukraine.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Under the Lisbon protocol to START I, Ukraine is committed to ratification of START I and early accession to the non-proliferation treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state. Fulfilment of these commitments will influence the extent to which co-operation and partnership between Ukraine and the west can be developed. A decision to retain nuclear weapons would jeopardise the implementation of START I, and thus START II, and would risk weakening the NPT. We believe it is in the interests of global security, and that of Ukraine, that the START reductions should be carried out and the NPT strengthened.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedure he plans to adopt to review European Community legislation passed before December 1991 in relation into its compliance with the principles of subsidiarity laid down by the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We attach great importance to the rigorous implementation of subsidiarity, both in relation to existing and proposed Community legislation. The Edinburgh European Council asked the Commission to present the outcome of its review of existing EC legislation to the Brussels European Council in December. We are discussing with EC partners and with the Commission which items of legislation should be repealed or amended on subsidiarity grounds.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of *(a)* overseas domestic workers and *(b)* their employers he estimates received his Department's "Information for Domestic Servants Travelling to the United Kingdom"; and whether the leaflets are written in the mother tongues of the intended recipients.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All domestic workers are handed a copy of an information leaflet when interviewed at post for entry clearance, and all employers are given a leaflet together with an explanatory note. Records are not kept of the numbers of leaflets issued.

Leaflets are available in English and Arabic. Arrangements are in hand for a translation to be made available in Tagalog—Filipino. Where an applicant does not understand English the contents of the leaflet are explained in their local language. The Home Office is currently producing copies in Spanish, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and Tamil.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the extension of maritime jurisdiction around South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In recent years, we have become increasingly concerned about the conservation of marine resources around South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands in the south Atlantic which is a British dependent territory. At present, the Crown's sovereignty and jurisdiction around South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands extend to the 12-mile limit of the territorial sea. For waters beyond this, we have hitherto relied solely on the work of the commission created by the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources—CCAMLR—a component of the Antarctic treaty system. This depends on flag state regulation and policing to apply conservation measures decided by consensus amongst the 22 members. We fully support CCAMLR and co-operate in the body's work. We have worked most energetically to strengthen the role of CCAMLR in its regulation of southern ocean fisheries. Although CCAMLR has provided timely and much-needed protection for commercially fished species, we are concerned that nevertheless fish stocks have been depleted.

Moreover, infringements of CCAMLR regulations have grown. The need to reinforce conservation arrangements in the area for which Her Majesty's Government are responsible is clear. Accordingly, Ministers have decided to strengthen conservation and management of marine resources around South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands by the introduction of national measures. These measures are intended to supplement not replace the role of CCAMLR and are of course fully compatible with it.

For this reason, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has instructed the commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands to issue a proclamation tomorrow to provide for the exercise of the Crown's sovereign rights to jurisdiction over a maritime zone and its natural resources, living and non-living, extending to a distance of 200 nautical miles around the territories.

In addition, an ordinance will be made, in due course, by the commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich islands designed to monitor and protect the state of the fish stocks within the maritime zone. This action will reinforce existing measures under CCAMLR.

Since their re-establishment in 1990, our relations with Argentina have progressed to their present excellent state and are now marked by a new openness and growing mutual confidence. This is a source of great satisfaction to Her Majesty's Government, who will continue to work to develop the relationship further. Against this background, it was natural for us to discuss our concerns over conservation fully with the Argentine Government with whom we have extensive exchanges on south Atlantic matters, particularly in relation to fisheries. We look forward to pursuing this dialogue.

PRIME MINISTER

Appointments

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Prime Minister how many peers have been appointed to offices of profit under the Crown since 1979.

The Prime Minister: This information is not available.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

EDUCATION

Testing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of the advertisements his Department placed in the national press on 27 April promoting the national testing scheme; and what plans he has to publish further advertisements on testing in schools.

Mr. Forth: Information about the cost of the advertisements is commercial in confidence. Further advertising is planned in the national press until the end of the campaign in May which concludes with magazine advertisements.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Unemployment

12. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the cost to the Exchequer of each unemployed person per year.

Sir John Cope: The Department of Social Security's annual report provides an estimate that, in the current year, a change in unemployment of 100,000 would result in a variation of £350 million in benefit expenditure or an average of £3,500 per unemployed person.

22. **Ms Short:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost to the Treasury in benefits paid and tax and national insurance payments forgone of the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Portillo: The Department of Social Security estimates that in 1993-94 the total cost of benefits paid to unemployed people will be £9·29 billion based on an unemployment assumption for Great Britain of 2¾ million. An estimate of tax and national insurance payments forgone is not produced, as it depends on the particular tax liabilities and earnings when in employment of each individual who is currently unemployed.

Recession

13. **Dr. Berry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to end the recession in Britain.

Mr. Nelson: Across the economy there are clear signs of a resumption of growth, reflecting our success in bringing down inflation. The Government's economic policies are designed to ensure that inflation is kept low and thereby support the recovery.

Industrial Production

15. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the latest trend in the level of industrial production.

Mr. Portillo: The recent trend in industrial production has been upwards: in the three months to February the index of production was 1¼ per cent. up on a year earlier. And business surveys point to continuation of an upward trend.

European Bank of Reconstruction and Development

16. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he has taken to influence the policy of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

Mr. Nelson: In his statement to the EBRD's annual meeting in London, on 27 April, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer emphasised the EBRD's duty to use taxpayers' resources as cost-effectively as possible. He stressed the need that the institution, which was established to promote efficiency and enterprise, should itself provide an example of sound financial management. Welcoming the changes agreed by the bank's board of directors to improve the control of its costs, my right hon. Friend argued for rapid and vigorous implementation of these. He also called for the bank to develop its key role in promoting effective mechanisms for assisting small and medium-sized enterprises in the countries of the former Communist bloc.

Cohesion Fund

17. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total sum to be distributed from the EC's proposed cohesion fund between now and 1999; and what part of this sum is estimated to come to the United Kingdom.

Sir John Cope: The Edinburgh European Council agreed a figure of 15·15 billion ecu for the period; and that only Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Greece would be eligible.

Petroleum Revenue Tax

18. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the petroleum revenue tax changes announced in the Budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Representations, including important support for the reform, have been received from a number of companies and individuals on the petroleum revenue tax changes.

Business Taxation

19. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact his 1992 Budget changes to business taxation have had on employment levels.

Sir John Cope: The changes in business taxes in the 1992 Budget, together with those in the autumn statement and this year's March Budget have strengthened the prospects for sustainable growth of output and employment.

Investment and Unemployment

20. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the relationship between the Budget measures for investment and unemployment levels.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ipswich on 1 April, at columns *371-72*.

Mortgage Rates

21. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when mortgage rates were last at their current level.

Mr. Nelson: Following the most recent cut in base rates, most mortgage lenders have announced mortgage rates below 8 per cent. They are now at their lowest level since April 1969.

Retail Sales

23. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when retail sales were last at their latest reported level.

Mr. Nelson: Retail sales in the first quarter of this year were at their highest level ever recorded.

Trade Balance

24. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to monitor the United Kingdom's balance of trade in the absence of official statistics.

Mr. Portillo: Statistics for the United Kingdom's trade with countries outside the EC have continued without interruption. Figures for our trade with all countries in the first quarter of 1993 will be published in the usual balance of payments released in June.

Domestic Fuel

25. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further plans he has to alleviate the effect on those on low incomes of charging VAT on domestic fuel.

Sir John Cope: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his Budget speech, extra help will be given from April 1994 to poorer pensioners and others receiving income-related benefits. The precise amount and the way in which this will be targeted will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security in the autumn.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on relations between Sudan and *(a)* the International Monetary Fund and *(b)* the World bank.

Mr. Nelson: The IMF is not providing any financial assistance to the Sudan which is in arrears to that institution. The World bank has provided one loan, for an emergency drought recovery project, since 1990; the bank has no current plans to make further loans.

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what differences there are in taxation of the various functions, services and purchases between those of a general practioner fund-holding practice and those of a non-fund-holding practice.

Mr. Dorrell: As far as VAT is concerned, there is no difference. For their NHS activities, both are considered to be part of the VAT registration of the regional health authority, and are treated equally. The position for trading income is that the same general rules on the taxation of trading profits apply whether or not the income of a general practitioner practice includes amounts allocated under the funding initiative.

Public Servants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report, 292-94*, if he will list the numbers and staff costs to the Exchequer of each central Government Department by civil service grade for 1979-80 and 1991-92; and what comparable information he has for local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: Information is not available centrally about the staff costs to the Exchequer of each central Government Department by civil service grade or about the staff grading or staff costs of local authorities.

Information on numbers of non-industrial staff in post in the major departments, broken down by selected occupational groups and grades, is given in the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" which is available from the Library. The 1991 and 1992 editions provide staffing information for 1 April 1991 and 1 April 1992 respectively. A breakdown by grade only is published in the 1979 and 1980 editions.

EC Payments

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional payments were made from the Consolidated Fund to the EC as part of the United Kingdom's total payments to the EC due to the increased VAT incurred as a result of contracting out in each year since 1982.

Sir John Cope: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what matters in regard to investment in global environmental protection were discussed at the most recent meeting of G7 Finance Ministers in Washington DC.

Mr. Nelson: None. The meeting focused primarily on the economic situation in the G7 countries.

VAT

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the level of the qualifying turnover for VAT since his Budget statement.

Sir John Cope: The few representations that have been received are divided between those who would like to see

the threshold raised significantly in order to exclude many more businesses from the tax and those who seek a much lower or nil threshold in order to minimise what they see as unfair competition for registered traders from those who are not registered.

Family Tax Bills

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on the average family's tax bill of the Budget changes in fuel costs, national insurance contributions, married couples' allowances and excise duties.

Sir John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 22 April at columns *172-78*.

Personal Debt

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the level of personal debt in the United Kingdom.

Sir John Cope: Total financial liabilities of the personal sector were £486 billion in the third quarter 1992.

Illegal Alcohol Imports

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what quantity of illegally imported alcoholic beverages have been impounded or confiscated by Customs and Excise officials in the first quarter of 1993;

(2) what estimate he has made, on a weekly basis, of the level of illegal importation of alcohol during the first quarter of 1993; and what his projection of the level was on 30 June 1992;

(3) how many cases Customs and Excise detected in the first quarter of 1993 of people illegally selling alcohol bought elsewhere in the EC at lower excise duty rates and imported into the United Kingdom ostensibly for personal use;

(4) what is his estimate of the percentage of abuse of the indicative level of alcohol and tobacco imports being detected by Customs and Excise officers; and what estimate he has made of the annual loss of revenue resulting from such abuse.

Sir John Cope: Details of detections of imported alcoholic drink illegally offered or intended for sale in the United Kingdom during the quarter ending 31 March are shown in the table.

Beverage	*seizures*	*Quantity litres*
Beer	51	47,064
Wine	15	7,385
Spirits	18	860

Any estimates as to the extent of undetected illegal importations would be largely a matter of speculation, but the revenue involved in the detected cases amounts in total to £57,834.

There is no longer any requirement for travellers to declare routinely details of tobacco and alcohol being brought into the United Kingdom from other EC member states for their personal use. Provided the goods are duty paid in the EC country of departure and are intended for personal use, the indicative levels, which function only as a guide, may be legitimately exceeded.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration is being given to ways of delaying the advent of stage 2 of EMU beyond 1 January 1994.

Mr. Nelson: I am not aware of any such consideration. Article 109e of the Maastricht treaty states that the second stage for achieving economic and monetary union shall begin on 1 January 1994.

Trinidad Terms

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to extend the Trinidad terms on world debt to countries not currently covered by them.

Mr. Nelson: The Paris Club of creditor countries has so far given debt relief on Trinidad terms to 15 of the world's poorest and most indebted countries, 12 of them in sub-Saharan Africa. They include Benin, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Republic, Honduras, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia. Trinidad terms are not intended for better-off but for heavily indebted countries, although I recognise that for some heavily indebted, lower-middle income countries, concessional debt relief may be necessary. Therefore, I welcome the call made by the G7 at the Munich summit to consider the special situation of some heavily indebted lower-middle income countries on a case-by-case basis.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes in the rates, rules and modus operandi of the ERM since the United Kingdom left the mechanism; and what studies European central bankers have made of its operation and its effects on the level of currency speculation between European currencies.

Mr. Nelson: On 16 September 1992, sterling and the lira were suspended from participation in the ERM and the peseta was devalued by 5 per cent. The peseta was devalued by 6 per cent. along with the escudo, on 23 November 1992, and the Irish punt was devalued by 10 per cent. on 1 February 1993.

There have been no changes in ERM rules over this period.

The European Council, meeting in Birmingham, endorsed the view of Economic and Finance Ministers that the recent financial turbulence calls for reflection and analysis in the light of developments in capital markets and in the European and world monetary systems. It invited Economic and Finance Ministers, assisted by the monetary committee, with the involvement of the Commission, to carry this work forward, with the central bank governors. This work is continuing.

Debtor Countries

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value to the United Kingdom of debt interest payments from developing countries in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 from *(a)* payments to the Export Credits Guarantee Department, *(b)* payments to the Overseas Development Administration, *(c)* payments to the Commonwealth Development Corporation and *(d)* in total.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The following data related to receipts received by each of the agencies from developing countries in the last three financial years. The figures include debt interest paid by Poland, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

£ million	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
ECGD	228·0	338·0	332·0
ODA	5·9	7·9	4·2
CDC	67·0	65·9	86·2
Total	300·9	411·8	422·4

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the value to the United Kingdom of debt interest payments from Zambia in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 from *(a)* payments to the Export Credits Guarantee Department, *(b)* payments to the Overseas Development Administration, *(c)* payments to the Commonwealth Development Corporation and *(d)* in total;

(2) what is the current total of outstanding debt owed to the United Kingdom by Zambia.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The details of individual debtors' positions are confidential to the country concerned. We cannot publish these figures without the consent of the authorities in the debtor countries. However, I can say that at the beginning of April the ODA wrote off £56 million of old aid debts with Zambia. This followed the International Monetary Fund's approval of Zambia's rights accumulation programme.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether negotiations have started for the second stage of Nicaragua's Trinidad terms debt agreement of 17 December 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Negotiations have not yet started for the second stage of Nicaragua's Trinidad terms debt agreement. Under that agreement, creditors agreed to consider a stock of debt reduction for Nicaragua after three or four years following a period of proven financial and economic responsibility. The Government are continuing to press the Paris Club to agree to earlier action on the stock of debt of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current total of outstanding debt owed to the United Kingdom by developing countries.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The latest figure available for the current total official outstanding debt owed to the United Kingdom by developing countries is £9·67 billion.

Premium Bonds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, column 405, if he will give details of the 12 changes made to the premium bond prize fund rate.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The details are as follows:

Prize fund rate changes

	Per cent.
1 August 1960	4·500
1 September 1968	4·625
1 August 1971	4·750
1 July 1973	4·875
1 July 1974	5·500
1 November 1976	5·625
1 January 1979	5·750
1 July 1980	7·000
1 November 1984	7·750
1 August 1987	7·000
1 July 1988	6·500
1 March 1993	5·000

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what inquiries he has made into reports of the unauthorised use of a tape recorder by Ministry of Defence police in Pateley Bridge magistrates court on 2 April; what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I understand that an allegation of unauthorised use of a tape recorder at the court was made to the clerk to the justices and that he has asked the Crown Prosecution Service to investigate. It is not a matter in which it would be proper for me to intervene.

WALES

County Structure Plans

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretry of State for Wales on what dates structure plans have been submitted by each of the eight Welsh counties since they came into existence, indicating which of these have been *(a)* accepted by the Welsh Office without amendment, *(b)* accepted subject to specific amendments and *(c)* rejected.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is set out in the table. All structure plans and alterations approved by the Secretary of State have been the subject of modifications prior to approval. No submitted structure plan has been rejected.

Structure Plans

Plan	*Submitted*	*Approved*
Clwyd	16 July 1979	15 July 1982
Clwyd Alterations No. 1	29 January 1990	31 October 1991
Dyfed	31 March 1980	11 July 1983
Dyfed Alterations No. 1	15 June 1987	12 October 1989
Gwent	17 April 1978	23 April 1981
Gwent Alterations No. 1	17 August 1984	17 September 1987
Gwent Alterations No. 2: Shopping	4 August 1989	21 June 1990
Gwynedd (Separate Plans for Anglesey,	29 March 1974	—
Caernarvonshire,	28 March 1974	—
Meirionydd and Dyffryn Conwy)	6 December 1974	29 July 1977
Gwynedd Replacement	1 February 1991	—
Mid Glamorgan	22 February 1979	11 March 1982
Mid Glamorgan Alterations No. 1	19 July 1985	22 August 1989
Powys	22 October 1979	26 January 1983
Powys Alterations No. 1	—	—
South Glamorgan	16 December 1977	14 January 1980
South Glamorgan Alterations No. 1	18 September 1985	31 May 1989
West Glamorgan	9 January 1978	11 September 1980
West Glamorgan Alterations No. 1	12 November 1984	11 December 1986
Plan	*Deposited*	*Adopted*
Gwent Replacement[1]	10 February 1992	—

[1] The Gwent Replacement Structure Plan was deposited following the implementation of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what circumstances he holds any form of public inquiry prior to making changes to a draft structure plan submitted to him by a county in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: As a result of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, county councils are required, unless the Secretary of State decides otherwise, to hold examinations in public on selected matters arising from structure plans, to provide additional information to help them come to a decision. Previously, when necessary, examinations in public were held on structure plans submitted to the Secretary of State to provide him with additional information necessary for the consideration and approval of the plan.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether county councils in Wales, submitting structure plans for ratification by the Welsh Office, must draw these up in line with uniform national criteria.

Mr. David Hunt: Structure plans prepared under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 are approved normally by the county council concerned. However, there are requirements to consult the Secretary of State who has powers to direct that a plan be referred to him for approval.

The form and content of structure plans is set out in regulations. In formulating the general policies in structure plans county councils are required to have regard to any regional or strategic planning guidance given by the Secretary of State to assist them in preparation of the plan, and current national policies.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration his Department gives to the varying social and cultural patterns in Wales when reviewing structure plans for the counties of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Regulations require planning authorities to have regard to social considerations in preparing their general policies and proposals in structure plans. Where appropriate the needs and interests of the Welsh language will be among those considerations. In considering structure plans before him for comment or approval, the Secretary of State takes account of these social considerations.

Children's Hospice

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to fund a hospice for terminally ill children in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The distribution of Government funding and the provision of hospice facilities and other care for the terminally ill is a matter for health authorities, following local discussion and agreement.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken and proposes to take to improve the access, safety and environmental conditions of Welsh inland waterways.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the British Waterways Board.

Palliative Care Services

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No such meeting has yet been sought by the council, but I shall be happy to consider the request if it does so.

Cancer (Drugs)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend the drug tariff to assist cancer sufferers.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Secretary of State for Health considers applications from companies to add products to part IX of the drug tariff so that they can be prescribed to patients under the NHS. Products are added to the tariff if they are considered to be safe, cost-effective and of acceptable quality and subject to the availability of resources within the family health services.

Void Properties

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the number of void properties in each local authority area of Wales expressed as a percentage of total council stock for each year since 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the table.

Local authority vacant dwellings expressed as a percentage of local authority stock[1]

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Aberconwy	0·9	0·6	1·0
Alyn and Deeside	1·1	0·6	0·9
Arfon	0·6	1·2	1·1
Blaenau Gwent	1·2	0·6	1·0
Brecknock	0·0	0·0	0·0
Cardiff	1·6	1·0	0·7
Carmarthen	0·1	0·4	0·3
Ceredigion	0·9	1·3	0·8
Colwyn	1·0	1·4	0·9
Cynon Valley	3·6	2·5	0·7
Delyn	1·0	0·4	0·6
Dinefwr	1·2	0·6	0·9
Dwyfor	0·4	0·8	1·2
Glyndwr	2·1	1·7	0·9
Islwyn	2·9	2·6	1·7
Llanelli	1·6	1·6	1·4
Lliw Valley	0·9	0·9	1·1
Meirionnydd	0·4	0·8	0·8
Merthyr Tydfil	1·6	1·1	0·7
Monmouth	1·6	1·9	1·3
Montgomeryshire	1·2	1·5	1·4
Neath	1·3	1·4	0·9
Newport	0·7	0·6	0·8
Ogwr	1·5	0·8	0·8
Port Talbot	5·2	3·1	3·0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	0·5	1·2	0·9
Radnorshire	0·8	0·8	1·1
Rhondda	1·8	0·6	1·0
Rhuddlan	1·1	0·7	0·7
Rhymney Valley	0·7	0·9	0·7
South Pembrokeshire	0·2	0·6	0·3
Swansea	0·8	0·6	0·6
Taff-Ely	1·8	1·5	0·9
Torfaen	1·3	1·2	0·8
Vale of Glamorgan	0·7	0·6	0·7
Wrexham Maelor	1·5	1·4	1·4
Ynys Mon	1·1	1·1	1·2

[1] At 1 April.
Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

Ms Rhiannon Anderton

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to give his ruling in the case of the appeal against Clwyd county council on behalf of Ms Rhiannon Anderton of Mold, Clwyd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The appeal against the provision specified in Rhiannon Anderton's statement of special educational needs raises a number of complex issues on which my right hon. Friend needs full information from the parties involved before he can reach his decision. The appeal is being dealt with urgently and a decision will be issued as soon as possible.

Welsh Language

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what organisations for grants to support the Welsh language under the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976, in the current financial year, were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful and which, in each category, were concerned with providing information on environmental protection and green issues.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The list of successful and unsuccessful applicants for grant to support the Welsh Language under section 26 of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 in the current financial year is as follows:

(a) Successful applicants
- National Eisteddfod
- Welsh Books Council
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru
- Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (The National Association of Nursery schools)
- Menter Cwm Gwendraeth
- Nant Gwrtheyrn (National Language Centre)
- Papurau Bro (Welsh Language local newspapers)
- CYD (The Learners Society)
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
- Merched Y Wawr
- National Federation of Women's Institutes
- Welsh Sunday Schools Council
- [1]Wales Young Farmers
- Gwynedd Pre-school Playgroups Association
- Cymru a'r Byd (Wales International)
- Welsh Consumer Council
- Council for Education in World Citizenship
- Childline
- RELATE
- Age Concern Wales
- [1]Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales
- PONT (Learners Group for Incomers)
- Dyfed Pre-school Playgroups Association
- The Carers Association
- Menter a Busnes
- Fifth International Conference on Minority Languages
- Menter Taf Elai
- North Wales Association for the Blind

(b) Unsuccessful applicants
- [1]GWELD (Information collation)
- [1]Friends of the Earth
- South Pembrokeshire Partnership for Action with Rural Communications (SPARC)
- Wales Assembly of Women
- Antur Llŷn
- Gwerin Y Coed—Woodcraft Folk
- Wales Pre-school Playgroup's Association
- [1]Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link
- Creu Cof (Involvement with the Media)
- TAD (Fathers for Bilingual Education)
- Samaritans

Presbyterian Church in Wales Youth Service
Disablement Welfare Trust
Wales Council for the Blind
The Ucheldre Centre
National Asthma Campaign
Dwyfor/Caernarfon Citizens Advice Bureau
Kids Clubs Network
Oxfam in Wales
Open University
[1]Creating New Job Standards for a Better Environment (COSQEC)
National Foster Care Association
Dewi Rhys-Jones
Welsh Womens Aid
Llaingoch and District Horticultural Society
Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust
[1]Gwarchodwyr Cefn Gwlad—Conservation Volunteers
Division for Social Responsibility Board of Mission
Wales Council for the Deaf
[1]Snowdonia National Park Society

[1]Applicants who submitted bids regarding the provision of information on environmental protection and green issues.

Skin Diseases

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people suffering serious *(a)* eczema, *(b)* psoriasis and *(c)* acne.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities in Wales have met the 4 per cent. quota of disabled workers set out in the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the table.

Local authorities employing at least 3 per cent. registered disabled people[1]

Year	*Number*
1979	15
1980	15
1981	14
1982	12
1983	11
1984	13
1985	9
1986	7
1987	8
1988	6
1989	3
1990	3
1991	4
1992	4

Source: Employment Department.
[1] The information relates to 1 June each year and is taken from data published in the Employment Gazette in respect of individual employers in the public sector.

Sheltered Workshops

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sheltered workshops are currently being run in Wales by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: There are 10 sheltered workshops currently being run in Wales by local authorities. A further workshop is run by a voluntary body acting as an agent for a local authority.

Provision of sheltered employment is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

A5

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the application to make the A5 between Chirk and Llandegai into a heritage route; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend's policy for the A5 is set out in "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s". Present plans are contained in the 1993 supplement to that document.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what schemes have been proposed to improve the A5 from Chirk to Llandegai; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend's plans for major improvements are set out in the 1993 supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s".

Housing (Special Needs)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a table listing all housing association and other applicants for housing grants or for housing-related grants in the fields of special needs in each of the last five years and in the current year, distinguishing each category of special need referred to, together with the amount applied for and the amount granted in each case in each year in each category.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not readily available.

Planning Decisions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many decisions by planning authorities in Wales have been revoked by him over the last two years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Republic (Students)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost to public funds for students from the Republic of Ireland now receiving their higher education in Northern Ireland in consequence of European Community agreements.

Mr. Hanley: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the estimated cost to public funds of tuition fees for students from EC countries, including the Republic of Ireland, holding mandatory or postgraduate awards in the 1992-93 academic year will be about £4·5 million.

Training Centres

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the 1993-94 budget for each of the training centres in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Andrew Hunter, dated 6 May 1993:

You have asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the 1993-94 budget for each of the Training Centres in Northern Ireland.

As Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland) the Secretary of State has asked me to reply.

The Training and Employment Agency operates a network of 12 Training Centres throughout Northern Ireland. At this stage in the training year, budgets have not yet been finalised for individual Training Centres as the main recruitment period follows the annual school leaving date in late June.

However, the Public Expenditure Survey allocation for the Training Centres network is:

	£ million
Programme expenditure (training costs, training allowances and related expenditure)	10·957
Capital, including energy efficiency measures	0·704

In addition salaries, travel, subsistance and other administrative costs will be met from the Agency's Running Cost Budget.

However the estimated net expenditure for each Training Centre, including central services costs, in 1992-93 was:

	£
Alfred Street/Leander House	625,200
Ballymena/Ballymoney	2,376,600
Boucher Road, Belfast	2,266,200
Craigavon	1,893,500
Dundonald, Belfast	2,140,000
Enniskillen	1,325,600
Felden	2,207,200
Lisburn	1,547,100
Maydown, Londonderry	1,568,200
Newry/Downpatrick	1,945,900
Omagh/Strabane	1,439,700
Springtown, Londonderry	2,164,700
	21,499,900

Health and Social Services Boards

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will establish an independent staff commission to review and monitor the personnel procedures of the health and social services boards in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Health and personal social services employing authorities are bound by legislation in relation to employment procedures. The management executive of the Department of Health and Social Services monitors their personnel policies, and has particular responsibility for the selection and appointment procedures which apply to all staff in the health and personal social services. It is considered unnecessary to set up such a commission.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total expenditure, including legal costs and compensation payments, incurred by each health and social services board in defending religion and sex discrimination cases over the past three years to 30 April.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Although the total expenditure occurred could be provided only at disproportionate cost, I will write to the hon. Gentleman with details of legal costs and compensation payments when this information has been compiled.

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list of children, including their ages, who were presumed killed or mutilated by the Irish Republican Army since 1969.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* A comprehensive list of persons who have been killed as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and mainland Europe, including name, date of death and a brief report of the incident, is currently being compiled and will be placed in the Library in due course. To 31 March 1993, there have been 42 children aged under 14 years killed in Northern Ireland, by terrorists. Sixty-two per cent. of these attacks are believed to have been carried out by Republican terrorists. Information on children injured is not available.

Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were on the waiting list for occupational therapy in the Down and Lisburn unit of management, Newry and Mourne unit of management and Banbridge and Craigavon unit of management in 1983, 1986, 1989 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* occupational therapists and *(b)* physiotherapists were employed in the Eastern and Southern health and social services boards; and, of

these, how many were employed in the Down and Lisburn unit of management, Newry and Mourne unit of management and Banbridge and Craigavon unit of management in each of the years ended 31 March since 1983.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The number of occupational therapists and physiotherapists employed in the Eastern and Southern health and social services boards, Down and Lisburn, Newry and Mourne, and Banbridge and Craigavon units of management in each of the years ended 31 March since 1983 was as follows:

Occupational Therapists

		Eastern board	*Southern board*	*Down and Lisburn unit*	*Newry and Mourne unit*	*Banbridge and Craigavon unit*
1983	NO	184	31	23	5	15
	WTE	160·7	30·0	21·0	5·0	14·5
1984	NO	182	35	23	7	15
	WTE	161·7	34·0	21·2	7·0	14·5
1985	NO	181	35	23	7	16
	WTE	161·2	34·0	22·1	7·0	15·5
1986	NO	188	37	24	8	15
	WTE	169·1	36·0	22·4	8·0	14·5
1987	NO	192	37	21	8	15
	WTE	172·5	35·8	20·1	8·0	14·3
1988	NO	200	39	24	9	15
	WTE	178·9	37·4	23·3	9·0	13·9
1989	NO	210	45	29	11	16
	WTE	187·5	42·8	25·3	10·5	15·3
1990	NO	190	49	26	11	19
	WTE	170·1	46·9	22·5	11·0	17·8
1991	NO	198	52	29	10	22
	WTE	175·5	49·0	25·1	10·0	19·8
1992	NO	206	57	31	13	20
	WTE	188·6	54·5	26·3	13·0	18·6
1993	NO	208	61	32	13	23
	WTE	188·6	58·0	27·4	13·0	21·5

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* physiotherapists and *(b)* occupational therapists are employed in the Eastern and Southern health and social services boards; and how many of these are located in the Down and Lisburn unit of management, Newry and Mourne unit of management and Banbridge and Craigavon unit of management;

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The number of physiotherapists and occupational therapists employed in the Eastern and Southern health and social services boards and located in Down and Lisburn, Newry and Mourne and Banbridge and Craigavon units of management at 31 March 1993 was as follows:

	Physiotherapists		*Occupational therapists*	
	Number	*WTE*	*Number*	*WTE*
Eastern H&SS Board	341	274·8	208	188·6
Southern H&SS Board	86	71·4	61	58·0
Down and Lisburn Unit	41	35·1	32	27·4
Newry and Mourne Unit	24	18·1	13	13·0
Banbridge and Craigavon Unit	36	30·8	23	21·5

Note
WTE = Whole Time Equivalents

Figures for Banbridge and Craigavon include both the community and hospitals units of management.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much will be spent or has been spent in each year from 1990-91 to 1995-96 on *(a)* stage 1 ESAs, *(b)* stage 2 ESAs, *(c)* stage 3 ESAs and *(d)* stage 4 ESAs, identifying how much of the total is allocated for the public access payments; what is the amount to be spent on (i) nitrate-sensitive areas, (ii) the moorland scheme, (iii) the habitat improvement scheme, (iv) set-aside management, identifying how much of the total will be for public access payments, and (v) organic farming in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Expenditure on payments to farmers in the two ESA areas designated in 1988 and 1989 was £200,000 in 1990-91, £393,000 in 1991-92 and £466,000 in 1992-93 and planned expenditure is £750,000 in 1993-94. Planned expenditure for revised and new ESAs designated in 1993 is £2 million in 1994-95 and £4·4 million in 1995-96. None of this funding is specifically allocated for public access.

While there are no plans at present to introduce a nitrate-sensitive areas scheme in Northern Ireland, public consultation documents have been issued under the agri-environment regulation for a moorland scheme, a habitat improvement scheme and an organic scheme. Planned expenditure on payments to farmers under these proposed new measures in Northern Ireland is £252,000 in 1994-95 and £1·08 million in 1995-96. The precise allocation between the schemes will be decided in the light of the results of public consultation. As is the case for ESAs, no payments are specifically allocated for public access.

Taxi Drivers (Terrorist Incidents)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all reported incidents since 1969, in date order, in which taxi or minicab drivers in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain were the victims of (i) loyalist and (ii) republican terrorists.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The information is not available in respect of Nothern Ireland and is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in respect of Great Britain.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Independent Television Companies

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet the Independent Television Commission to discuss the implications of the merger of Yorkshire Television and Tyne-Tees Television for the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I do not consider a meeting with the chairman of the Independent Television Commission to be necessary. The monitoring of licence conditions is the responsibility of the ITC and not the Government, and I understand that the ITC is discussing with Yorkshire Tyne-Tees Holdings how it proposes to fulfil its licence obligations.

Ancient Monuments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many scheduled ancient monuments are currently at risk as a result of ploughing; and how many have been damaged since the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

Mr. Brooke: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 1 March, *Official Report*, column *14*. It is not known how many scheduled monuments are at risk as a result of ploughing or how many may have been damaged through ploughing since 1979. English Heritage will shortly be embarking on a study to identify those monuments most at risk.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to propose to landowners practical and financial arrangements to prevent the destruction of scheduled ancient monuments through ploughing.

Mr. Brooke: English Heritage already offers advice to landowners and, under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, often negotiates management agreements, which can involve financial payment, for the protection of sites. I will consider the case for further action in the light of the study which English Heritage is about to undertake of monuments at risk from ploughing.

Archaeological Sites

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what effect the introduction of policy planning guideline 16—PPG 16—has had on the protection and investigation of archaeological sites blighted by redevelopment proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced on 9 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *124*, the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of PPG 16 one year after it was published. A copy of the report of the review was placed in the Library. It indicated that the advice given in PPG 16 has been adopted by every local planning authority in England, and that the archaeological significance of planning applications is now much more fully considered. I am satisfied that the guidance is proving valuable to all parties who may become involved with archaeology and the planning process.

Lighting Costs

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the current annual cost of lighting the exterior of *(a)* Buckingham palace, *(b)* St James's palace, *(c)* Clarence house and *(d)* other Government buildings in Whithall and Parliament square.

Mr. Key: The royal palaces and residences referred to are not floodlit. The lighting of the exterior of Government buildings in Whitehall and Parliament street is the responsibility of the individual Departments, but I understand that the cost is currently around £40,000 per year. The House authorities are responsible for the floodlighting of the Palace of Westminster and I understand that the cost is around £7,000 per year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Dr. Strang: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out the role the Agricultural and Food Research Council has with respect to horticulture; and what resources are deployed including manpower and finance by the council with respect to horticulture.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The Agricultural and Food Research Council's programme includes basic and strategic research which underpins horticulture. The council's funding for horticultural research at Horticulture Research International and in universities is expected to be £4·5 million in 1993-94. A total of 561 staff at Horticulture Research International are currently AFRC employees. In addition, AFRC supports 17 research assistants on three-year horticulture-related projects in universities.

Research and Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is Her Majesty's Government's response to the proposals for the Commission's fourth framework research and development programme launched by Research Commissioner Ruberti on 22 April.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 4 May, at column *26*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is a requirement for each European Community-supported infrastructure project in the United Kingdom and in each other member state to have had an environmental assessment and an economic assessment; and what arrangements are made for the assessments to be available to members of the public.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are no special provisions for the environmental impact assessment of European structural funds projects, but all such projects must conform with national and Community environmental legislation.

Where a proposed development is of a type listed in directive 85/337/EEC and is likely to have significant environmental effects, environmental assessment will be required under the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988. For such projects the applicant must prepare and submit an environmental statement, setting out the likely effects of the project on the environment, with the application for planning permission. Notice must be publicised in a local newspaper and copies of the statement made available for inspection and placed on the planning register.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), on 16 April, *Official Report*, column *763*, what is the breakdown by county of the amount of ECGD guarantees in default.

Mr. Needham: The total of £8,118·5 million in respect of gross paid claims, plus interest, under ECGD guarantees which have not been recovered or have been written off as at 31 March 1992 is made up of amounts on 130 different countries.

The largest are:

	£ million
Nigeria	1,957·1
Poland	1,544·4
Brazil	903·6
Iraq	391·5
Yugoslavia	362·8
Mexico	292·4
Egypt	286·9
Sudan	277·1
Zambia	206·4
Tanzania	161·8
Argentina	130·9
Morocco	108·4
Jordan	102·5
Gabon	90·5
Zaire	87·0
Congo	86·9
Mozambique	83·7
Iran	82·2
Peru	81·4
Guyana	70·7
Angola	67·6
Ecuador	59·6
Cuba	58·6
Philippines	55·5
Cameroon	46·1

Serbian Companies

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies based in Serbia currently operate from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Needham: The Department is aware of 36 companies in the United Kingdom that are "persons connected with Serbia or Montenegro" for the purposes of United Kingdom sanctions legislation.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action the Government have taken to ensure that no Serbian company is trading in the United Kingdom in violation of UN sanctions.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom has implemented the following legislation in respect of UN sanctions. It applies to all United Kingdom companies.

Orders

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1302 (5 June 1992)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1303 (5 June 1992)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Sanctions Order) (Dependent Territories) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1304 (5 June 1992)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Prohibition of Flights) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1305 (5 June 1992)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Prohibition of Flights) (Dependent Territories) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1308 (5 June 1992)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Sanctions) (Channel Islands) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1272 (31 May 1992)
The Export Goods (Control) (Serbia and Montenegro Sanctions) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1992 No. 1419 (12 June 1992)
The Export Goods (Control) (Serbia and Montenegro Sanctions) (Revocation) Order 1992

Statutory Instruments 1993 No. 1189 (26 April 1993)
The Export Goods (Control) (Croatian and Bosnian Territories) Order 1993

Statutory Instruments 1993 No. 1188 (1 May 1993)
The Serbia and Montenegro (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1993

Statutory Instruments 1993 No. 719 (10 March 1993)
The Export of Goods (Control) (Bosnia-Herzegovina) (ECSC) Order 1993 (c)

Statutory Instruments 1993 No. 1200 (30 April 1993)
The Export of Goods (Control) (Bosnia-Herzegovina) (ECSC) (Revocation) Order 1993

Carbon Tax

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom policy position on the carbon tax put to the Joint Energy and Environment European Council meeting on 23 to 24 April; what proposals were put forward by the Ministers of other EC member states; in what respects agreement has not been reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West

(Mr. Bellingham) on 5, May *Official Report*, columns *109-10*, reporting on the recent joint session of the Energy and Environment Councils.

Timeshare

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the organisations that have made representations to him over timeshare accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have received many representations concerning timeshare accommodation. My Department sought representations from interested parties in connection with the Timeshare Act 1992 and the draft EC Commission directive on timeshare which is currently under discussion in Brussels.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the increase in radioactive dosage to the surrounding area involved in the application by Nuclear Electric to set up an incinerator to dispose of contaminated oil at Trawsfynydd power station.

Mr. Eggar: The environmental statement which accompanied the application stated that the increase in radioactive dosage to the most exposed member of the public would be in the region of 0·005 microSieverts per annum. This is equivalent to 0·0002 per cent. of natural background radiation.

Wood Imports (Thailand)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of hard and softwood imports from Thailand for each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: United Kingdom imports of hardwood from Thailand were worth £0·79 million in 1990, £0·16 million in 1991 and £0·32 million in 1992. The United Kingdom has not imported any softwood from Thailand in the last three years.

Post Office Counters Ltd.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with Post Office Counters Ltd. about the method of payment of pensions and benefits following privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: No decision has been made to privatise Post Office Counters Ltd. and the Post Office review is considering both public and private sector options. A statement will be made to the House in due course. In the meantime, I continue to have regular discussions with senior Post Office management on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration has been given to the retention of Post Office Counters in the public sector following privatisation of the rest of the Post Office.

Mr. Leigh: With the exception of Parcelforce, no decision has been made on whether to privatise any part of the Post Office. Within the Post Office review, we are considering private and public sector options.

Leather Goods

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement concerning the penetration into the EC retail market of leather goods manufactured in China, India and elsewhere outside the EC.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures for the EC retail market for leather goods are not available.

Dividends

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the trend for companies to offer dividends in the form of advanced scrip issues of shares rather than cash; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department has received one representation about enhanced scrip dividends. Where companies make arrangements giving shareholders the alternative of cash or additional shares, the Department's main concern is that the offer is open on equal terms to all shareholders. It is for company shareholders to consider the merits of the offer and to vote accordingly when the relevant resolution is put to the general meeting.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), on 28 April, *Official Report*, columns *415-16*, what were the voting figures for each member state recorded in the meeting of the EC's Internal Market Council held on 5 April.

Mr. Needham: No formal votes were taken at the Internal Market Council on 5 April.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson), on 29 April, *Official Report*, column *492*, when he expects to complete and publish the Government's proposals on assisted area status.

Mr. Sainsbury: I will announce the results of the present review as soon as practicable following the necessary clearance from the European Commission.

Noise

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations the National Physical Laboratory has made into hum noise complaints relating to low frequency noise; and what results were published.

Mr. Leigh: The National Physical Laboratory has not carried out any investigations into hum noise complaints in recent years.

I would refer the hon. Member to the Building Research Establishment, an agency of the Department of the Environment, where I understand some work of this kind is pursued.

Land Rover Exports

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tariff or other barriers are faced by exports of Land Rover products to the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The export of Land Rover products to the United States of America is subject to the import tariffs provided for in the United States harmonised tariff schedule.

Vehicle Exports

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received concerning barriers to trade faced by exports of four-wheel drive vehicles to the United States of America; and what action he has taken as a result of those representations.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* Representations have been received from British exporters about proposals to reclassify sports utility vehicles as trucks for US import tariff purposes. Her Majesty's Government have made known their concerns to both the previous and current US Administrations.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how sanctions against the former Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro are enforced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Several Departments are responsible for applying sanctions in the United Kingdom. They act rigorously against any suspected breach of UN sanctions in co-operation with HM Customs and Excise.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is the estimated value of total imports from former Yugoslavia in each year since 1990 and in 1993 to date;

(2) how many goods bearing labels stating "Made in Yugoslavia" or "Designed and Produced in Yugoslavia" were sold in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990 to date.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* United Kingdom imports from Yugoslavia by *(a)* country of despatch, and *(b)* country of origin are given in the table.

The country of dispatch is the last country in which the goods were bought or sold before coming to the United Kingdom while the country of origin is the last overseas country in which significant processing took place. The available statistics do not separately identify the country where the goods are made, designed or produced, or how they are labelled.

United Kingdom imports from Yugoslavia[1]

£ thousands

	(a) Country of despatch	*(b) Country of origin*
1990	189,435	219,931
1991	147,877	179,767
1992	123,797	150,458
1993[2]	16,561	18,750

[1] The 1993 figures refer to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia.

[2] January to February.

Sources:

(a) Business Monitor MM20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

(b) Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether wooden butchers' blocks are included in the items which are covered by the complete United Nations embargo against Serbia and Montenegro.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Yes. The export of all goods to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—Serbia and Montenegro—from the United Kingdom is prohibited. The only exceptions are foodstuffs, medicines and humanitarian aid which are licenced on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sanctions are applied to British companies selling goods made in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Sanctions apply to goods made in the former republics of Yugoslavia—Serbia and Montenegro—which left the republics after the imposition of sanctions on 30 May 1992. Breach of sanctions legislation can lead to the prosecution of companies involved.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards imports of goods bearing labels "Made in Yugoslavia".

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* It is prohibited to import goods into the United Kingdom from the Republics of Yugoslavia—Serbia and Montenegro—and suspected breaches of sanctions legislation are investigated. However, goods which were imported into the United Kingdom from the former Yugoslavia before the imposition of sanctions on 30 May 1992 are not affected.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many import licences have been issued by his Department for import of goods from *(a)* the former Yugoslavia, *(b)* Serbia and *(c)* Montenegro since 31 May 1992; for what goods; for which companies; and at what total value.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Since 31 May 1992, the Department has issued 762 import licences for goods imported from the former Yugoslavia; 210 covered imports from Serbia and Montenego, mainly personal items of small value. Sanctions apply to all imports from Serbia and Montenegro and licences were issued only for goods exported before 31 May 1992 or where the United Nations gave approval. As regards the rest of the former Yugoslavia, no sanctions are in force; quantitative restrictions apply only to a limited number of goods and the licences issued were mainly for textile products—85 per cent. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of importers cannot be given. Licences are issued by reference to quantity rather than value.

Regional Development Funding

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further discussions he has had on his discussions with the European Commission about the

possibility of extending objective 1 status to other parts of the United Kingdom in addition to the current proposals for Merseyside and the highlands and islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 4 May 1993]*: The European Commission's proposals for objective 1 regions are currently being considered by a Council working group. The United Kingdom continues to press the case for Devon and Cornwall, rural Wales and South Yorkshire to be added to the list of objective 1 regions when the decision is taken by the Council of Ministers.

Electricity (Restrictive Trade Practices)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlay his decision to issue the Electricity (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Exemption) Order 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 May 1993]*: The Electricity (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Exemption) Order 1993 removes from the scope of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 certain contracts between coal producers, the electricity generators and the regional electricity companies made before 1 April 1993. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made the exemption order taking account of the importance the Government attached to securing the future of the British coal industry.

Sour Gas

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has carried out into the *(a)* toxicity and *(b)* inflammability of sour gas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

The offshore safety division of the Health and Safety Executive is currently involved in a number of research projects concerned with deleterious effects on sour gas. Research into the effects of sour gas flammability is also part of general studies on the effects of fire and explosions on offshore structures.

SCOTLAND

Stobhill hospital

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his officials have had with Greater Glasgow health board concerning the application for trust status by Stobhill hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: One of the criteria against which all trust applications are considered is that of long-term viability. Discussions between my officials and Greater Glasgow health board on that aspect of the Stobhill application are on-going.

Infertility

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to set a ceiling on the amount a health board may charge for infertility treatment.

Mr. Stewart: Services are either provided under the national health service, in which case no charge is made, or privately, in which case the charge is determined by the clinic concerned.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received following his rejection of the National Medical Advisory Committee's recommendations that treatment for infertility at the Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow units should be centrally funded.

Mr. Stewart: Representations have been received from right hon. and hon. Members on behalf of constituents, from infertile couples and other individuals and from a body concerned with the interests of those with fertility problems.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many couples received assisted conception treatment in 1992 at each of the Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow units; what was the average cost at each; and what contribution was made by the local health board and the individuals concerned.

Mr. Stewart: Information on the number of couples receiving treatment in 1992 will not be available from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority for some time yet. However, details of the number of treatment cycles provided during 1991 should be available from the authority in July of this year.

As the treatment at the Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee centres is offered on a private basis, information on average costs and the precise funding arrangements is not held centrally. However, the National Medical Advisory Committee report "Infertility Services in Scotland" shows that patients have been charged £1,450 per treatment cycle at Aberdeen and £1,250 at Edinburgh. At Dundee, patients were asked to consider offering a donation towards the costs of their treatment. No charge is made for treatment at the Glasgow centre which operates within the NHS.

Cancer Screening

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his oral answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, columns 1153-54, if he will list those persons who will join Dr. Euphemia McGoogan in the inquiry into the inaccurate reporting of cervical smear tests by certain members of the staff of the Inverclyde Royal hospital, Greenock; if he will outline the terms of reference of the inquiry; and when he expects to receive a report of the inquiry.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 4 May at column *35*. Dr. McGoogan has indicated that the report should be available by early summer.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend cervical and breast cancer screening to teenage girls and women aged 65 years and over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There are no plans to extend the age ranges for routine screening. Women are already offered screening for breast cancer at three-yearly intervals between the ages of 50 and 64 years. There is not yet evidence to show that screening younger women for breast cancer is of benefit.

For cervical cancer, health boards have been asked to offer screening to women aged 20 to 60 at no more than

five-yearly intervals. In practice, health boards screen on a three-yearly cycle. Any younger women thought to be at risk or women over 60 who do not have a history of satisfactory tests may have a cervical smear under present arrangements.

Cross-border Policing

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to cross-border policing issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am today issuing a paper prepared jointly by my Department and that of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which examines the issues affecting policing across the border between Scotland and England. At present, police officers may exercise their powers only in the country in which they are based. This presents problems when an officer has to cross the border between England and Scotland in the course of duty. The increasing sophistication and mobility of criminals has served to highlight the problem over recent years.

A recent paper produced by the four border police forces of Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Borders, Cumbria and Northumbria helpfully focused the present difficulties. My right hon. and learned Friend and I therefore decided to consider whether there was scope for improving on the present situation. The consultation document seeks views on options to help resolve the difficulties.

The document also touches on jurisdictional issues confronting courts in England and Scotland in relation to cross-border crime, but concludes that this complex subject must be treated separately.

We have invited comments on the paper by 18 June and shall welcome views from everyone with an interest in these issues. I hope that interested parties will respond quickly so that we can identify the best way forward.

Copies of the paper are available to hon. Members in the Library and, as usual, in the Vote Office.

Borgie Estate

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the disposal of Borgie estate by his Department.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Borgie estate was gifted to the nation by the Duke of Sutherland in 1917 for the settlement on the land of returning service men from the 1914-18 war. To take account of changed circumstances, the purposes of the gift were extended in 1960 and the variation to the deed of gift stipulated that if, at any time in the future, the Secretary of State for Scotland should contemplate disposal of the land, he shall first offer it back to the Duke of Sutherland or his successors. Against this background the reconveyance of Borgie estate to Sutherland Estates took place on 28 April 1993, in accordance with Government policy on the disposal of surplus land.

Lung Cancer and Coronary Heart Disease

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current incidence of lung cancer and coronary heart disease in Glasgow.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* A total of 1,179 new cases of lung cancer were registered in respect of residents in the Greater Glasgow health board area in 1991; comparable data are not available for heart disease. Also in 1991, there were 1,043 deaths from lung cancer and 3,100 deaths from ischaemic heart disease in Greater Glasgow.

Astronomical Appointments

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when appointments will be made to the posts of Astronomer Royal for Scotland or Director of the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Advice will be tendered in due course to Her Majesty the Queen on an appointment to the office of Astronomer Royal for Scotland. The Science and Engineering Research Council, for which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible, recently made changes to the management structure of the astronomical observatories as a result of which the posts of director of the Royal observatory, Edinburgh and director of the Royal Greenwich observatory have been succeeded by an overall director of observatories. An appointment to this post was made on 15 March 1993.

Tariff Rebate Subsidy

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are the terms of reference of the review of the tariff rebate subsidy scheme to the Scottish islands in which his department is involved; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether representations have been sought from Orkney islands council and Shetland islands council in respect of the review into the tariff rebate subsidy scheme for shipping services to the Scottish islands.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend is at present considering the need to review the existing arrangements under which he provides financial assistance for shipping services in the highlands and islands. Any such review would involve consultation with local interests, including the islands councils.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much will be spent or has been spent in each year from 1990-91 to 1995-98 on *(a)* stage 1 ESAs, *(b)* stage 2 ESAs, *(c)* stage 3 ESAs and *(d)* stage 4 ESAs, identifying how much of the total is allocated for the public access payments; what is the amount to be spent on (i) nitrate-sensitive areas, (ii) the moorland scheme, (iii) the habitat improvement scheme, (iv) set-aside management identifying how much of the total will be for public access payments and (v) organic farming in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* There is a single budget for ESAs in Scotland. Expenditure was approximately £1 million in 1990-91, £1·1 million in 1991-92 and £1·1 million in 1992-93. Planned expenditure is £5·3 million in 1993-94, £7·7 million in 1994-95 and £7·9

million in 1995-96. There is no nitrate-sensitive areas scheme. Consideration of the need for any agri-chemicals measures awaits the results of water quality surveys expected to be completed at the end of this year. My Department has issued for consultation proposals for schemes on heather moorland extensification, habitat creation, the management of set-aside land, and organic farming. Planned expenditure on these proposed measures is £3 million in 1994-95, and £5·8 million in 1995-96. The allocation between the schemes will be decided in the light of the consultation process.

Forestry

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of tax relief given for afforestation in 1987-88 and the value of grants paid to private woodland owners in 1991-92; and what was the amount of new planting in 1991-92 as a percentage of that undertaken in 1987-88.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The exact value of the tax relief claimed for forestry operations, including afforestation and restocking, before forestry was removed from the scope of taxation in 1988-89, is not recorded, but it was estimated to be about £10 million in 1987-88. In addition, private woodland owners received grants of £9 million in the same year. The total Government support was, therefore, about £19 million, which is equivalent to £25 million at 1991-92 prices. Private woodland owners received grants of £17 million in 1991-92, representing about 70 per cent. of the total support in 1987-88.

A total of 14,147 hectares of new planting was grant-aided in 1991-92, which was 59 per cent. of the area in 1987-88. The total area planted with grant-aid in 1991-92, including restocking, was 21,978 hectares, which was 77 per cent. of the area planted in 1987-88.

Lanarkshire Development Agency (Consultants)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the consultants used by Lanarkshire development agency over the last two years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* While expenditure on consultancy studies above certain delegated authorities requires the approval, respectively, of Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Office, the choice and use of consultants is essentially a matter for the local enterprise companies themselves; and the Scottish Office holds no central record of the use of consultants. I suggest, therefore, that the hon. Member should take this matter up direct with Lanarkshire development agency.

HEALTH

Regional Health Authorities

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what moneys have been paid to the Audit Commission by regional health authorities and her Department in the last five years; and if she will break down the figures by the categories of service provided.

Mr. Sackville: The statutory external audit function was transferred to the Audit Commission from the Department of Health with effect from 1 October 1990. The Audit Commission levies charges directly to each health body. Audit costs for the part year 1990-91 were not analysed separately. For the financial year 1991-92, the total expenditure recorded in the financial statements of regional health authorities was £1,217,614. This figure does not include expenditure by other national health service bodies such as NHS trusts and district health authorities. No further information is available centrally of this expenditure by category of service provided.

Payments were made by the Department for work associated with the paving legislation and for pensions of staff transferred to the Audit Commission.

Patients

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the methods presently used to measure patient activity levels; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will now make it her policy to ensure that all hand-pieces used by general dental practitioners are autoclaved after being used on each patient;

(2) if she will now make it her policy to ensure that all general dental practitioners use disposable gloves which are not re-used for successive patients.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department has already issued guidance which covers both the autoclaving of hand pieces and the use of disposable gloves, the maintenance of clinical standards is primarily a matter for the dental profession. The latest advice from the Department is contained in "Guidance for Clinical Health Care Workers —Protection Against Infection with HIV and Hepatitis Viruses" of January 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists, who have not given notice to leave the dental list, have given written notice to each family health services authority to terminate or deregister some or all of their capitation arrangements for child patients in each week since 20 November; how many dentists have deregistered patients; and how many patients have been deregistered.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information provided weekly by family health services authorities since July 1992 shows that in the period up to 23 April 1993, 201 dentists have given written notification to deregister 1,421 child patients. The tables set out, by FHSA, for each week since 20 November 1992, the number of new dentists who have deregistered child patients and the total number of child patients deregistered by all dentists.

Number of dentists deregistering child patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Gateshead	0	0	1	1
Calderdale	0	0	0	1
Leeds	0	0	3	0
Nottinghamshire	10	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	1	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Essex	0	1	1	2
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	2	1	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	1	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	0	0	1	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	2	0	1	2
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	1
	12	3	10	8

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	5	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	1	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	1
Kent	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	1	1	2
Devon	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	1	0
Lancashire	1	1	3	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	2	2	10	3

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Leeds	1	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	1	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	1	0
Devon	1	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	2	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	1	0	0
Bury	0	1	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	2	2	4	0

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	2	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	1	0	0
Solihull	0	0	1	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	1
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	1	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	1	3	1	1

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	2
Leeds	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	2
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	1	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	1	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	0	2	0	4

Notes:
Dentists who first de-registered patients between week ending 3 July 1992 and week ending 20 November 1992 are not included in this table, even if they de-registered patients between 21 November 1992 and 23 April 1993 since each dentist is only counted once on the first occasion he de-registered a patient. In the 68 FHSAs not included in this table, no dentist first de-registered a patient between 21 November 1992 and 23 April 1993.
A small number of FHSAs have submitted revised figures. These amendments have been included in the cumulative totals but not in the weekly totals. The sum of the weekly totals does not therefore equal the cumulative total.

Number of child patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Cumbria	0	0	0	3
Durham	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	2	2
Humberside	29	0	3	2
Calderdale	0	0	0	1
Kirklees	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	5	0
Nottinghamshire	25	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	3
Norfolk	14	1	0	3
Suffolk	0	0	1	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	2	1	4
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	1	2	1	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	1	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	3	7	104	0
Staffordshire	0	0	3	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	5	4	1	2
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	2
	77	16	122	23

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Cumbria	3	1	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	1	1	0
Humberside	7	2	0	1
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	0	3
Leeds	8	2	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	3	3	0	0
Norfolk	7	0	13	0
Suffolk	3	0	7	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	1	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	4
Kent	0	2	2	1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	5	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	2	2	3
Devon	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	2	0
Lancashire	4	2	5	1
Bolton	0	6	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	35	22	37	13

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Cumbria	8	0	1	3
Durham	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	2	0	0
Humberside	1	4	2	1
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	0	0
Leeds	1	0	2	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	16	2	1	0
Suffolk	0	4	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	3	7	0	39
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	1	1	0
Devon	2	0	17	0
Staffordshire	0	3	2	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	3	1	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	3	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	31	29	27	43

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Cumbria	2	3	0	5
Durham	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Humberside	3	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	1	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	0	1
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	5	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	18	5	1	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	1	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	1
Devon	1	5	3	1
Staffordshire	0	0	0	3
Coventry	0	2	0	0
Solihull	0	0	2	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	3
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	2	1	0	2
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	26	23	6	16

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Cumbria	6	2	1	0
Durham	1	1	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Humberside	2	0	0	0
Calderdale	2	0	0	2
Kirklees	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	0	1
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	2
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	2
Essex	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	14	2	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	0	6	4	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	2	0	2
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	2	3	0	0
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
	27	16	5	10

Notes:

(1) No patients have been deregistered in the 59 remaining FHSAs during this period.

(2) A small number of FHSAs have submitted revised figures. These amendments have been included in the cumulative totals but not in the weekly totals. The sum of the weekly totals does not therefore equal the cumulative total.

Hospital Support Services

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts for contracted-out hospital support services have been affected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of dispensed drugs cost the national health service less than the current prescription charge; and what was the proportion in 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The prescription charge is not, and never has been, directly related either to the particular item prescribed or to the actual cost to the national health service of dispensing it. It is an amount which successive Governments have thought it reasonable for those who can afford to do so to contribute towards the cost of NHS pharmaceutical services. In 1993-94, an estimated 50 per cent. of prescribed items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors will cost the NHS less than the prescription charge of £4·25. Data for 1979 are not available.

Asthma

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the trend in the incidence of asthma in children.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available on trends for asthma occurrence in children in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: There is some evidence for a gradual increase in the incidence of asthma in children in England and Wales over recent years—weekly returns service of the Birmingham research unit of the Royal College of General Practitioners 1987-91. There is also some evidence that hospital admissions have increased over the last decade. Caution is required in assessing trend data from routine sources, because of changes over time in the data collection systems and in the likelihood of asthma being correctly diagnosed.

In-vitro Fertilisation

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-vitro fertilisation and gamete intrafallopian transfer treatments were carried out on the national health service and privately in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Information about the total number of treatments given in the United Kingdom is shown in the tables. It cannot be broken down into categories requested.

IVF data 1985-90

	Patients	Cycles	Transfers	Pregnancies	Live Births	Preg rate/ transfer per cent.	Live birth/ transfer per cent.
1985	3,717	4,308	3,032	481	364	15·9	12·0
1986	4,687	7,043	3,798	754	605	19·9	15·9
[1]1987	7,488	8,899	5,592	980	760	17·5	13·6
1988	7,515	10,489	6,553	1,354	956	20·7	14·6
1989	8,790	10,413	7,363	1,599	1,157	21·7	15·7
1990	9,964	11,583	8,195	2,004	1,443	24·4	17·6

[1]Excluding one large centre with incomplete data

GIFT data 1987-90

	Patients	Cycles	Transfers	Pregnancies	Live births	Preg. rate/ cycle per cent.	Preg. rate/ transfer per cent.	Live Birth rate/ transfer per cent.
1987	2,288	2,658	—	498	—	18·7	—	—
1988	2,840	3,392	2,899	707	—	20·8	24·4	—
1989	2,581	3,079	2,584	586	361	19·0	22·7	14·0
1990	2,332	2,671	2,179	539	358	20·2	24·7	16·4

Source: Statistical Analysis of the United Kingdom: IVF and GIFT Data 1985-90, Interim Licensing Authority, published June 1992.

Infertility and Gynaecology Units

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* infertility units and *(b)* gynaecology units there were in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Adoptions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in each age cohort were adopted in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Yeo: The information is shown in the table drawn from "Marriage and Divorce Statistics Series FM2" published annually by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Age at adoption 1977-1991 — *England and Wales*

			Age									
	All ages		*Under 1*		*1-4*		*5-9*		*10-14*		*15-17*	
Year	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1977	12,748	100	2,945	23	3,002	24	4,185	33	2,192	17	424	3
1978	12,121	100	2,816	23	2,593	21	3,996	33	2,225	18	491	4
1979	10,870	100	2,649	24	2,183	20	3,572	33	2,013	19	453	4
1980	10,609	100	2,599	24	2,090	20	3,414	32	2,041	19	465	4
1981	9,284	100	2,365	25	1,910	21	2,784	30	1,823	20	402	4
1982	10,240	100	2,177	21	2,162	21	3,197	31	2,151	21	553	5
1983	9,029	100	1,962	22	2,094	23	2,651	29	1,832	20	490	5
1984	[1]8,648	100	1,836	21	1,935	22	2,605	30	1,728	20	526	6
1985	[2]7,615	100	1,605	21	1,645	22	2,261	30	1,625	21	454	6
1986	[3]7,892	100	1,572	20	1,748	22	2,349	30	1,652	21	495	6
1987	[4]7,201	100	1,333	19	1,694	24	2,164	30	1,462	20	495	7
1988	[5]7,390	100	1,235	17	1,975	27	2,231	30	1,415	19	453	6
1989	[6]7,044	100	1,115	16	1,875	27	2,244	32	1,331	19	458	7
1990	[7]6,533	100	969	15	1,871	29	2,099	32	1,197	18	392	6
1991	7,171	100	895	12	2,071	29	2,409	34	1,381	19	415	6

[1] Total includes 18 cases where age was not stated.
[2] Total includes 25 cases where age was not stated.
[3] Total includes 76 cases where age was not stated.
[4] Total includes 53 cases where age was not stated.
[5] Total includes 81 cases where age was not stated.
[6] Total includes 21 cases where age was not stated.
[7] Total includes 5 cases where age was greater than 17.
Source: OPCS "Marriage and Divorce Statistics FM2".

Pharmacists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the head of population per pharmacist for each European country.

Dr. Mawhinney: The table shows the average population per pharmacy for the countries of the EC. Hospital pharmacies are not included.

Country	*Population per pharmacy*	*Year*
Belgium	1,738	1987
Denmark	15,000	1987
Germany	3,530	1990
Greece	1,333	1990
Spain	2,173	1990
France	[2]2,568	1990
Ireland	3,120	1990
Italy	[2]3,752	1989
Luxembourg	5,265	1991
Netherlands	[2]10,006	1991
Portugal	4,000	1991
United Kingdom	[2]4,456	1992

Source:
[1] Commission of EC.
[2] Department of Health files.

Infertility

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many men, women and couples were treated for primary and secondary infertility in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many centres were licensed to provide artificial insemination by donor in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Centres which provide artificial insemination by donor have been licensed only since August 1991 when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority assumed its full powers under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. During the transitional period of one year from 1 August 1991, 85 such clinics were operating and applied to be licensed by the authority. Seventy-nine clinics in England are currently licensed by the authority.

Ozone Levels

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has promoted into the impact of high concentration ozone levels on human health in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: The advisory group on the medical aspects of air polluton episodes considered the evidence on

the medical effects of exposure to ground level ozone in its first report which was published in August 1991. Copies are available in the Library.

The advisory group concluded that the ozone levels experienced in the United Kingdom, which are at their highest during hot weather, are unlikely to produce any permanent lung damage. The group made a number of recommendations for research, including basic research on the biochemical and cellular mechanisms involved in the effects of ozone on the lung; research on the effects of low concentrations of ozone upon man; and epidemiological studies on the possible relationship between exposure to air pollutants in general, and ozone in particular, on health. The Department has raised this with the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom.

Mental Hospitals (Discharges)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish statistical details relating to the residence of persons who have been discharged from long-stay mental health beds and hospitals since 1986.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available in the form requested. Information is available on the pattern of destination of discharged patients in 1989-90 and is given in the Department of Health's "Government Response to the third report from the Health Committee Session 1990-91" para 45, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Sexual Health

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to promote sexual health initiatives with young people; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", includes the challenging target to reduce the rate of conceptions amongst the under-16s by at least 50 per cent. by the year 2000. Measures which are effective in substantially reducing pregnancies in the under-16s can be expected to have a similar effect on unwanted pregnancies in the over-16s.

A range of initiatives is underway both nationally and locally to support progress towards "The Health of the Nation" targets and objectives. Guidance to the national health service draws attention to the need for separate, less formal family planning services for young people, with staff experienced in dealing with the particular needs of this group and their problems. Progress in the NHS is being monitored. The family planning section of the HIV/AIDS and sexual health key area handbook, published by the Department in January 1993 and issued to all health authorities, focuses on the best ways of providing effective services, particularly for young people, and includes many examples of good practice. It also suggests that health authorities responsible for purchasing health care should consider commissioning at least two clinic sessions per week dedicated to young people. A copy is available in the Library.

The White Paper makes clear that everyone—parents, health services, local authorities, the voluntary and educational sectors and the Government—need to work together to achieve "The Health of the Nation" targets. We particularly welcome in this context my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education's decision to issue last month for consultation a draft revised circular on sex education in schools.

Grants have been awarded to enable voluntary organisations to carry forward projects related to the aims of "The Health of the Nation" White Paper. These organisations include the Family Planning Association and Brook Advisory Centres, which provide services directly to young people under 25. In addition to the provision of designated young people's health care services, there is a need for effective sexual health education programmes. With this in mind, a new three-year project grant has been awarded to the Sex Education Forum to facilitate the development of a centralised information network for all those involved in sex education.

The Department will be looking further at ways in which the quality and range of family planning services may be developed and improved. This includes addressing issues such as training, the provision of better information for patients, and how best to meet the needs of young people.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sexual health targets are set by health authorities; and how these are decided.

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" White Paper sets challenging targets for improvement in the key area of sexual health. National health service authorities are already acting to implement the recommendations in "First Steps for the NHS" and will be working with the National Health Service Management Executive to apply the national targets at regional and, where appropriate, district and family health service authority level.

Children in Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were in local authority care in each local authority in England during 1992.

Mr. Yeo: Information is not yet available about the numbers of children looked after at 31 March 1992 by individual local authorities. However, the Children Act Report 1992 contains estimated totals for England by legal status, including whether subject to a care order.

The number of children who were in the care of each local authority in 1991 are given in "Children in Care of local authorities year ending 31 March 1991, England".

Copies of the publications referred to are in the Library.

Mental Health Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she has funded to identify *(a)* contact with community mental teams, *(b)* residential accommodation and *(c)* unmet needs for long-stay patients in mental health hospitals, within each United Kingdom regional health authority.

Mr. Yeo: Responsibility for assessing the needs of mentally ill people rests with district health authorities and local authority social services departments. Department of

Health funded-research concerning community care for mentally ill people is included in "Community Care: Findings from Department of Health funded research 1988-1992", a copy of which is available in the Library. The national health service research and development programme supports several studies on services available to long-stay mentally ill patients, alternative accommodation and arrangements for discharge. This is being managed by the Yorkshire regional health authority, and the hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bryan Askew, the chairman of the health authority, for details.

Waiting Lists

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the current information available about surgical waiting lists in *(a)* Rochdale district health authority and *(b)* each of the regional health authorities in England.

Mr. Sackville: Provisional waiting list figures for each regional health authority at 31 December 1992 were published on 9 February 1993 in press release H93/547. Information on Rochdale health authority can be found in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England at 30 September 1992", copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on achieving the commitments on waiting lists as laid out in the patients charter.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service has been extremely successful in meeting the waiting time commitments in the patient's charter. The latest provisional figures show that there are no patients waiting two years or more for in-patient or day case treatment in any region. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 May, at 31 March 1993 there were no patients waiting more than 18 months for a hip replacement or cataract operation and only eight patients waiting more than 18 months for a knee replacement operation.

Tranquilliser Addiction

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to compensate tranquilliser addiction patients; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what services are available within the NHS for treatment and counselling for those affected by tranquilliser addiction.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* We have no plans to compensate such patients. Health authorities, including family health services authorities, are responsible for ensuring that a range of services are available to meet the needs of people who wish to withdraw from tranquillisers. These are provided by both primary care teams and the secondary care sector, and include counselling, withdrawal therapy and the gradual replacement of tranquillisers by non-prescribing interventions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Capital Investment

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the planned capital investment in cash and real terms by *(a)* Government and *(b)* private sources in each of the non-departmental bodies sponsored by his Ministry and engaged in research, for each year since 1978 and the proposed expenditure for the next three years beginning 1993.

Mr. Gummer: The information that is available on capital investment by the relevant bodies without incurring disproportionate cost is as follows. The data cannot be divided between Government and private sources.

	Actuals			*Projected*
	1990-91 £ *million*	*1991-92* £ *million*	*1992-93* £ *million*	*1993-94* £ *million*
Apple and Pear Research Council	0·001	—	—	0·002
Horticultural Development Council	0·011	0·020	0·015	0·012
Home-Grown Cereals Authority	0·026	0·051	0·072	n/a
Horticulture Research International	0·510	4·370	8·090	12·270
Meat and Livestock Commission	1·380	1·264	1·264	1·645
National Institute of Agricultural Botany	0·011	0·019	0·023	0·026
Potato Marketing Board	0·316	1·104	1·767	n/a
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew	1·600	1·900	2·100	0·900
Cash prices	3·855	8·728	13·331	14·855
1992-93 prices	4·260	9·033	13·331	

Note: n/a = not available.

Research

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what definitions he uses of near-market, strategic and basic research with respect to the activities of each non-departmental public body currently in receipt of funds from his Ministry.

Mr. Gummer: All research and development funded by my Department is categorised according to the definitions of the "Frascati Manual"—the measurement of scientific and technical activities—published by the OECD, Paris 1981. The manual identifies three types of research and development work—basic research, applied research and experimental development. Applied research may have either strategic or specified aims and be subdivided accordingly.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has made of the cost to non-departmental bodies sponsored by his Ministry of

the 1992 devaluation of the pound sterling as this affects funding sourced from international subscriptions; and what changes have been made to research programme budgets in consequence.

Mr. Gummer: I have made no such estimates and I am not aware of any such costs.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Government-funded research stations relating to *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* horticulture and *(c)* food have either closed or been lost through amalgamation since 1978; and how many jobs in (i) research and scientific grades and (ii) other grades were shed as a consequence of each closure each year.

Mr. Gummer: The numbers of Government-funded research stations which have closed or amalgamated since 1978 are as follows:

Stations relating to:	*Closed*	*Amalgamated*
Agriculture	10	11
Horticulture	5	8
Food	2	1

Statistics on job losses are not held centrally in the form requested, nor are they monitored site by site in every instance. Moreover, some losses will have arisen for other reasons and some staff will have been redeployed by parent organisations.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the Government's investment plans with respect to agriculture, horticulture and food research for each year until 1996.

Mr. Gummer: My Department's estimates of proposed expenditure on agriculture, horticulture and food research are £123·9 million in 1994-95 and £126·4 million in 1995-96.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was total Government expenditure and non-departmental external expenditure in agriculture, horticulture and food research for each year since 1978 in cash and real terms; and what proportion of the total funding requirement of non-departmental research bodies linked to his Ministry has been met from external non-governmental sources since 1978.

Mr. Gummer: I have given details of total Government expenditure on agriculture, horticulture and food research in response to another of the hon. Member's questions. Comprehensive information is not available on non-departmental external expenditure. The amount of funding met from external non-governmental sources as a proportion of the total research and development budget for the non-departmental research bodies linked to my Department is as follows.

External non-governmental funding as a proportion (per cent.) of total R&D budget

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Horticultural Development Council	100·0	100·0	100·0
Apple and Pear Research Council	100·0	100·0	100·0
Meat and Livestock Commission	48·3	55·3	55·0
Horticulture Research International	23·6	22·6	23·9
National Institute of Agricultural Botany	68·0	36·2	33·2
Home Grown Cereals Authority	100·0	100·0	100·0
Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew)	0·7	2·4	5·1
Potato Marketing Board	90·0	93·8	97·1

Comparable figures for years before 1990-91 are not available.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the policy underlying the current research programmes and how each programme ranks in terms of the priority he attaches to them.

Mr. Gummer: Research is undertaken to support the Ministry's aims which are to protect the public, to improve the economic performance of the agriculture, fishing and food industries, enhance the rural and marine environment, prevent flooding and coastal erosion and protect farmed animals and fish.

The Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food advises Agriculture Ministers and the chairman of the Agriculture and Food Research Council on priorities for research and development and the allocation of research and development budgets. The board's recommendations guide the allocation of resources in the research and development programme.

Research and development strategy documents for agriculture and food are published by the Ministry. These are available in the House of Commons Library.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research establishments and projects which have received funding from either the Agriculture Research Council or Horticulture International in the last year; and if he will list the amounts involved.

Mr. Gummer: Horticulture Research International is not a funding body. The research establishments which received funding from the Agricultural and Food Research Council in the last year, together with the amounts involved, are as follows:

	£ million
Institute for Animal Health	12·58
Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics Research	14·01
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research	8·34
Institute of Arable Crops Research	12·35
Horticulture Research International	2·57
Institute of Plant Science Research	9·67
Institute of Food Research	12·73
Silsoe Research Institute	5·34

In addition, the Agricultural and Food Research Council's research grant expenditure with universities and other academic institutes amounted to £23·71 million.

Information on individual projects can be found in the AFRC handbook, copies of which are available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many personnel were employed in

(a) agriculture, *(b)* horticulture and *(c)* food research in (i) research and scientific grades and (ii) other grades, in each area in each year since 1978.

Mr. Gummer: Staffing statistics are not kept on the basis requested and so the information is not available.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research programmes since 1990 which have been subject to a cut in funding by 5 or more per cent. and those programmes which have been cancelled, including those which were never brought on stream.

Mr. Gummer: The level of funding by my Department is kept under constant review both during each year and from year to year, in order to make the best possible use of available resources. Changes in the funding of individual research programmes are an inevitable consequence of this policy. Details of expenditure by my Department, both increases and decreases, for individual research programmes since 1991-92 are given in the table. Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

Research group	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*	*1993-94 £ million*[1]
(a) Horticulture, Plant Protection and Agricultural Resources Policy Group	8·3	9·7	10·5
(b) Arable Crops and Alcoholic Drinks Group	3·8	3·9	4·5
(c) Meat Group	6·1	6·3	6·7
(d) Pesticides, Veterinary Medicines and Emergencies Group	22·2	23·5	21·6
(e) Animal Health and Veterinary Group	19·9	20·8	22·0
(f) Chief Scientist's Group (Agriculture and Horticulture)	5·8	7·9	7·8
(g) Environmental Policy Group	12·9	13·1	13·5
(h) Food, Drink and Marketing Policy Group	3·8	4·5	5·9
(i) Food Safety Group	0·0	0·0	0·3
(j) Land Use Conservation and Rural Economy Group	2·9	3·7	5·8
(k) Food Science Group	18·4	18·3	21·2
(l) Aquatic Environment, Salmon whaling and inland fisheries, conservation of sea fish stock; fish farming and shellfish production	8·3	8·9	9·1

[1] Estimate.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations in the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sectors to which the Government make funds available for research with respect to agriculture, horticulture and food.

Mr. Gummer: A record of the organisations to which the Government make funds available for agriculture, horticulture and food research is not kept centrally. My Department, however, contracts research mainly with the following categories of research organisations:

Research Councils
Other Government Departments
Higher Education Institutes
Private industries and companies
Public companies and corporations
Research Associations, Authorities, Boards and Commissions
Non-industrial Research Institutes
MAFF Agencies, ie ADAS, Central Science Laboratory, Central Veterinary Laboratory
MAFF's Food Science Laboratory

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total Government expenditure for agriculture, horticulture and food research for each year since 1978 in cash and real terms; and what funding is to be made available to the Agriculture and Food Research Council and Horticulture Research International for the five years beginning 1993.

Mr. Gummer: Government funding for research and development on agriculture, horticulture and food is mainly directed through the Agricultural and Food Research Council—AFRC—the Scottish Office Agriculture and Food Department and the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland and my own Department. Expenditure on such research from these sources is given in the table, in cash and real terms:

Year	*Cash £ million*	*Real terms*[1] *£ million*
1978-79	n/a	n/a
1979-80	n/a	n/a
1980-81	n/a	n/a
1981-82	n/a	n/a
1982-83	n/a	n/a
1983-84	n/a	n/a
1984-85	191·8	290·2
1985-86	190·3	273·0
1986-87	192·7	267·6
1987-88	190·9	251·5
1988-89	203·2	249·6
1989-90	210·6	242·6
1990-91	239·7	255·5
1991-92	247·8	247·8
1992-93	273·7	264·4
1993-94	288·2	271·1

[1] using the GDP inflator (1991-92 = 100)

A number of other Government bodies fund research into agriculture, horticulture and food but figures on their expenditure are not held centrally.

The amount of funding made available to AFRC from the science budget of the Office of Science and Technology and from my Department amounts to £145 million in 1993-94. Funding available to Horticulture Research International amounts to £13·5 million in 1993-94. The allocation of funds in future years will be notified to the AFRC and HRI as soon as decisions have been reached.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was Government expenditure in nominal and real terms for each year since 1978 for research into *(a)* the relationship between farming and the environment, *(b)* organic farming, *(c)* whole crop utilisation and novel crops including alternative uses for arable crops, *(d)* raising the productive potential of the principal agricultural commodities, *(e)* food safety and *(f)* animal welfare.

Mr. Gummer: Information regarding Government expenditure is given in the table. Details of expenditure are available for the financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93 only. The spend for 1993-94 has yet to be finalised. Prior to 1991-92 the data were not recorded in the required format and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

	1991-92 Cash £ million	1991-92 Real terms[1] £ million	1992-93 Cash £ million	1992-93 Real terms[1] £ million
(a) Farming and environment	56·5	56·5	63·9	61·7
(b) Organic farming	1·0	1·0	1·2	1·1
(c) Whole crop utilisation	4·2	4·2	4·8	4·6
(d) Plant and animal breeding and genetics	25·0	25·0	21·4	20·7
(e) Food safety	11·5	11·5	14·5	14·0
(f) Animal welfare	6·6	6·6	7·6	7·3

[1] Using GDP deflator (1991-92 = 100).

Notes

The data presented are of direct relevance to the topic areas identified. Other research work, not included here, also touches upon these areas and is of indirect relevance.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the total expenditure of his Ministry for each year since April 1991 and over the next three years is accounted for by research and development projects aimed at reducing the cost of the common agricultural policy to the consumer and to public funds.

Mr. Gummer: The question is not answerable in the terms in which it is posed. Reduction in the cost of the CAP is an objective which pervades a very wide range of MAFF's policies, many of which are supported by research and development programmes.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of his Ministry's research funds for each year since 1978 has been expanded on *(a)* pure and *(b)* applied projects.

Mr. Gummer: As I have indicated in response to another of the hon. Member's questions, my Department's research funds are classified by the definitions of the "Frascati Manual" and details are set out in the table.

Year	Basic research £ million	Applied strategic £ million	Research specific £ million	Experimental development £ million	Total £ million
1978-79	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979-80	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980-81	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981-82	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982-83	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983-84	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1984-85	6·4	20·7	46·5	45·8	119·4
1985-86	4·5	38·1	43·1	32·7	118·4
1986-87	4·9	34·9	43·3	35·2	118·3
1987-88	5·5	32·5	42·1	33·7	113·8
1988-89	5·7	41·5	40·7	26·3	114·2
1989-90	6·3	45·0	48·6	12·2	112·1
1990-91	8·6	47·9	51·0	11·6	119·1
1991-92	10·6	54·4	54·9	1·6	121·5

n/a = not available

Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Central Science Laboratory

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff are currently employed in research work by the Central Science Laboratory; and what is his projection for the number to be employed when relocation is complete on a single site in York.

Mr. Gummer: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to the Central Science Laboratory and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Letter from Dr. P. I. Stanley to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 6 May 1993:

The Central Science Laboratory currently employs 266 staff engaged on research and development work.

It was announced by the Minister on 31 March that the Food Science Laboratories at Norwich and Torry will merge with the Central Science Laboratory to form an enlarged Agency which will come into operation on 1 April 1994. There are no plans at present, however, to relocate any of the Norwich or Torry staff to Yorkshire.

My projection for the number of research staff to be employed in Yorkshire in the financial year 1997-98, when relocation will be complete, is 265.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the relationship between the Central Science Laboratory work and that of non-departmental bodies sponsored by his Department; and if he will list the projects on which the Central Science Laboratory is currently engaged.

Mr. Gummer: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to the Central Science Laboratory and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Letter from Dr. P. I. Stanley to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 6 May 1993:

The Central Science Laboratory is involved in collaborative research with the Agricultural and Food Research Council's Institute of Arable Crops Research.

The projects on which the Central Science Laboratory is currently engaged are:

Studies in resistance in crop pests,
Effects of pesticides on beneficial insects,
Barley yellow dwarf virus in Autumn and Winter,
Seed weevil and pod midge.

Postgraduate Students

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of his Ministry's postgraduate studentships in agriculture and food studies for the academic year beginning 1 October 1991 directly covered or related substantially to *(a)* the relationship between farming and the environment, *(b)* organic farming, *(c)* whole crop utilisation and novel crops

including alternative uses for arable crops, *(d)* raising the productive potential of the principal agricultural commodities, *(e)* food safety and *(f)* animal welfare.

Mr. Gummer: The number of postgraduate research studentships awarded by my Department in these areas in the academic year beginning 1 October 1991 was as follows:

	Number
(a) relationship between farming and the environment	12
(b) organic farming	1
(c) whole crop utilisation and novel crops including alternative uses for arable crops	—
(d) raising the production potential of the principal agricultural commodities	23
(e) food safety	7
(f) animal welfare	6

Horticulture Research Institute

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to introduce legislation to merge the Horticulture Research Institute into a single organisational structure; and what is the Horticulture Research Institute's present organisational status within his Ministry.

Mr. Gummer: Horticulture Research International already operates as a single organisational structure. It integrates under single management the staff and facilities of the former Institute of Horticultural Research of the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the former experimental horticulture stations of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service. It is a next steps non-departmental public body sponsored by my Department and governed by a management statement. Legislation will be introduced as soon as possible to establish Horticulture Research International as a statutory corporation and to transfer seconded staff to its direct employment.

EC Agriculture Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) of 28 April, *Official Report*, column *409*, what were the voting figures for each member state recorded in the meeting of the European Community's Agriculture Council held on 26 and 27 April.

Mr. Curry: The following decisions were adopted unanimously:

ending of the milk co-responsibility levy;
extension of support prices for dried fodder and cauliflowers by one month;
permission for Portugal to introduce a national aid for wine distillation.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployed People (Travelling Expenses)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the maximum daily travelling expenses that can be claimed by unemployed people who participate in job search seminars or in job review workshops when they travel by *(a)* public transport or *(b)* private transport; what entitlement participants in both schemes have to travel expenses to enable them to attend the follow-up support sessions that are provided by the seminars and workshops; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 6 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about travel expenses for participants who attend job search seminars and Job Review Workshops. This is something which falls within the responsibilities she has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Both programmes are of short duration, normally lasting two full days with some additional follow up. They are designed to help short term unemployed people find work more quickly. The seminars and workshops are run by organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors, under contract to the Employment Service. As I explained in my earlier reply of 14 April, people who attend are paid their travelling expenses to the main sessions and to the follow up events. This is done by the programme providers who re-imburse participants the cost of travelling from their homes to the seminar or Workshop. The providers then recover this money from the Employment Service.

Participants are expected to travel by the most cost effective mode of transport, normally standard class public transport. If participants prefer to use their own car or motorcycle they are paid a mileage allowance of 16p per mile provided this is cost effective, for example, where public transport is poor or there is good reason to use a vehicle. Otherwise if they choose to use their own transport they will receive the equivalent public transport cost.

People with a disability problem which affects their mobility may claim travelling expenses at the mileage rate if they wish to use their own private vehicle. They may also be re-imbursed parking fees. Taxi fares will also be paid where a person's disability prevents them using either public transport or private vehicle.

There is no upper limit laid down which states the maximum daily travelling allowance that can be claimed by participants. There is however a network of job search seminar and Job Review Workshop provision throughout the country and we would expect people to be offered places at a convenient location.

As decided by the Administrative Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Labour Statistics

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the total labour force, the numbers unemployed and the numbers self-employed and employed in manufacturing and service sectors by standard industrial classification of the employment source in *(a)* 1963, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1979 and *(d)* the most recent period for which information is available; and what were the percentage changes in each sector between each of those successive dates.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been in continuous employment in the same job for (i) six

months, (ii) one year, (iii) two years, (iv) three years, (v) four years and (vi) five years; and what is the breakdown of the figures between manufacturing industry and the retail trades.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available information on length of time in current job based on the labour force survey is given in the table:

Great Britain, Autumn 1992 not seasonally adjusted.

Thousands

	All in Employment		*Manufacturing industry*		*Retail trade*	
	Men	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
6 months or more	12,484	9,885	3,471	1,307	976	1,438
1 year or more	11,737	9,090	3,288	1,213	895	1,296
2 years or more	10,585	7,793	3,012	1,070	762	1,052
5 years or more	7,431	4,716	2,118	632	467	571

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish the latest figures for employment of people with disabilities, as a proportion of the total work force, for *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector, and for employment classifications within these sectors; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not available.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the 1993-94 budget for each training and enterprise council in England.

Mr. McLoughlin: Regional offices of the training, enterprise and education directorate are currently finalising contracts with training and enterprise councils for 1993-94 budgets and the information is not yet available.

It has been decided that TEC level information should be released publicly only six months after the beginning of the contracting year. The information must remain commercially confidential while TECs are negotiating with their providers. The information requested on allocations for 1993-94 will therefore be publicly available on 1 October 1993.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she will publish the draft TEC operating agreement for 1993-94.

Mr. McLoughlin: A copy of the TEC operating agreement for 1993-94 is available in the Library.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it her policy to allow training and enterprise councils three-year plans for funding and planning and for arranging provision for training managers locally; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* Subject to the money being voted by Parliament, each training and enterprise council is guaranteed a minimum level of funding for the main adult programmes and their local initiative fund over three years. This should allow TECs to plan local provision with confidence.

Training

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to extend training credit schemes to adults.

Mr. McLoughlin: The use of training credits within adult training programmes is already being tested by a number of training and enterprise councils. TECs were informed last November that they were free to deliver training for work through adult credit systems. The Government policy is to encourage TECs to consider adult credits in appropriate circumstances.

Radiation Emergencies

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many sites have been exempted from regulation 3 of the Public Information for Radiation Emergency Regulations 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: No sites are exempted from regulation 3 of the Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulation 1992—PIRER. In fact, there are no powers to exempt employers from regulation 3 of PIRER except for that provided under regulation 5 which is vested in my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and can be exercised only in the interest of national security.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list each incident in the United Kingdom since 1963 that would have qualified as a radiation emergency if regulation 2 of the Public Information for Radiation Emergency Regulations 1992 had been in force.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is thought that there have not been any incidents in the United Kingdom since 1963 that would have qualified as a radiation emergency under regulation 2 of the Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992. However, it is not possible to provide the information required to verify this without incurring disproportionate costs.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes have occurred in the past year in the way that unemployment figures are administratively processed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The basis of the monthly unemployment statistics produced by the Employment Department remains as it has been since October 1982: a count of the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits at Employment Service local offices on the day of the count.

Law Students

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether students taking bar finals and Law Society finals are eligible for the career development loans scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Career development loans—CDLs—can and are being used to fund individuals taking their bar and Law Society finals. The participating banks may issue suitable clients with CDLs which support up to 12 months of study, including 12 months of a longer course. In addition training and enterprise councils may sponsor applications for up to two years of study.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the percentage quota of disabled people employed by each local area authority in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Tables showing the number and percentage of registered disabled people employed by a wide range of individual employers in the public sector, including local authorities, are published annually in *Employment Gazette*. The figures are published with the agreement of the employers concerned. The latest available figures, which relate to 1 June 1992, are in the April 1993 *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local authorities in England and Wales have met the 3 per cent. quota of disabled workers set out in the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 in each year since 1979; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 6 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the number of local authorities in England and Wales who have employed a three per cent. Quota of disabled people in each year since 1979. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information you requested is set out in the attached table.

The information relates to 1 June each year and is taken from data published in the Employment Gazette in respect of individual employers in the public sector.

However, the figures do not give a complete picture of the extent to which people with disabilities are employed by local authorities. Quota figures reflect only the employment of people with disabilities who chose to register under the 1944 legislation. Many eligible people with disabilities are not registered.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

England and Wales
Number of local authorities employing at least 3 per cent. registered disabled people

Year	*Number*
1979	64
1980	63
1981	51
1982	44
1983	41
1984	43
1985	36
1986	33
1987	30
1988	31
1989	23
1990	22
1991	13
1992	15

Health and Safety

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the complement of the inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. McLoughlin: Details of planned staffing to 1 April 1994 in the Health and Safety Executive are contained in the "Health and Safety Commission Plan of Work 1993-94 and beyond" due to be published shortly. This will indicate that the number of inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive is planned to rise from 1,532 at 1 April 1993 to 1,685 at 1 April 1994.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average duration of a low-flying sortie by a fast jet.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Approximately 45 minutes.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations and dates of periods of covert monitoring of low-flying operations conducted by Royal Air Force police since 1987.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since 1987 the RAF police have carried out covert surveys at the following locations over the following periods.

Date and location
1987
16–18 March—Banham Zoo
7–9 April—Penrith, Morpeth and Amble
14–15 April—Pickering and Jedburgh
1 June—Peterborough
7–8 July—Redmile
21–24 July—Dumfries and Galloway
21–24 July—Builth Wells
4–6 August—Grindleford Bridge
4–6 August—Alnwick
5 August—Haltwhistle
11–12 August—Leighton Hall, Carnforth
13–14 August—Castle Farm, Devon
19–20 August—Haxby
15–17 September—Scarborough
21–25 September—Ettrick
1988
14–18 March—Amble
25–28 April—Quedgeley and Hardwicke

26-27 April—Braunston
7 June—Farndon
14-16 June—Crediton
21-23 June—Kidwelly
22 June—Tumble
27-29 June—Stonehouse
28-30 June—Keswick
12 July—Hexham
12 July—Holme on Spalding Moor
18-21 July—Builth Wells
26-27 July—Machynlleth
23-25 August—Morpeth
6-8 September—Halesworth
11-13 October—Melrose
18-20 October—Milford Haven
Late October/early November—Redburn
15-17 November—Newark/Farndon

1989
6-9 February—Upper Chute, Hampshire
25-27 April—Liskeard, Cornwall
2-4 May—Gloucester
8-11 May—Blencarn, Cumbria
15-19 May—Wigtown, Dunfries and Galloway
22-26 May—Haddington, Lothian
26-30 June—Knaresborough, North Yorkshire (Skyguard deployment)
24-27 July—Earl Shilton, Leicestershire
24-27 July—Market Bosworth, Leicestershire
31 July-4 August—Penrith, Cumbria (Skyguard deployment)
26-27 September—Glan Conwy, Gwynedd
3-5 October—Alnwick, Northumberland (Skyguard deployment)

1990
30 January-1 February—Machynlleth, Powys
5-9 March—Wetheral, Cumbria
25-28 March—Llanrhidian, West Glamorgan
26-30 March—Hereford
26-30 March—Alnwick area, Northumberland Kelso area, Borders (Skyguard deployment)
15-17 May—Melrose, Borders
22-24 May—Inverness and Dingwall, Highlands
25-28 June—St. Mary's Loch, Borders
10-13 July—Glastonbury/Shepton Mallet, Somerset (Skyguard deployment)
17-20 September—Grange over Sands, Cumbria (Skyguard deployment)
1-2 October—Richmond, North Yorkshire (Skyguard deployment)
3-4 October—Leeming, North Yorkshire (Skyguard deployment)
15-18 October—Cosford, Warwickshire
13-15 November—Peterborough, Cambridgeshire (Skyguard deployment)

1991
23-25 April—Richmond/Barnard Castle, North Yorkshire (Skyguard deployment)
14-16 May—Chatteris, Cambridgeshire
4-6 June—Brough, Humberside
1-4 July—South Wales Powys (Skyguard deployment)
16-18 July—Northumberland, Morpeth (Skyguard deployment)
22-25 July—Builth Wells, Powys
5-8 August—Hebden Bridge, North Yorkshire
20-22 August—Auldgrith, Dumfries and Galloway
9-12 September—Great Torrington, Devon
23-26 September—Keswick/Kendal, Cumbria
14-17 October—Hexham, Northumberland
22-24 October—Cley/Stiffkey, Norfolk (Skyguard deployment)
4-7 November—Cumbernauld, South Clyde
18-21 November—Melrose, Borders

1992
21-23 January—Market Rasen, Lincolnshire
10-13 February—East Fortune, Lothian (Skyguard deployment)
9-12 March—Duns, Berwickshire (Skyguard deployment)
10-12 March—Oakford, Devon
6-9 April—Newton Stewart, Dumfries and Galloway
7-9 April—Carmarthen, Dyfed (Skyguard deployment)
28-30 April—Malton, North Yorkshire
5-7 May—Carlisle, Cumbria
18-21 May—Dumfries (Skyguard deployment)
8-11 June—Forest of Dean, Gloucester and Hope Under Dinmore, Hereford and Worcester (Skyguard deployment)
29 June 2 July—Beverley/Linley Hill Aerodrome, Humberside (Skyguard deployment)
11-14 August—East Anstey, Tiverton, Devon
21-24 September—King's Lynn, Norfolk
21-24 September—Conan Bridge, Firth, Highlands (Skyguard deployment)
6-7 October—Norwich, Norfolk
3-5 November—Llanyyold, North Wales
17-18 November—Market Deeping, Lincolnshire (Skyguard deployment)
24-26 November—Morpeth, Northumberland

1993
22-26 February—Cockermouth, Cumbria (Skyguard deployment)
22-25 February—Ingleton, North Yorkshire
2-4 March—Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Avon
15-18 March—Stafford
29 March-1 April—Belford, Berwickshire
26-30 April—Hereford (Skyguard deployment)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names, dates and locations of all low-flying exercises conducted in each year since 1987, where advance notice was given to hon. Members in affected constituences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In each year since 1987, notice of the following exercises has been given to hon. Members whose constituencies were likely to experience unusual low-flying activity:

Exercise name	*Exercise dates*	*Exercise location*
1987		
Gryphon's Gunner	6 March	Lincolnshire
Polar Dawn III	7-8 March	Norfolk
Key Lift 87	7-15 March	North Yorkshire
Quicksand	15-22 March	Many areas with centre on Northumberland
Mallet Blow 87/1	6-10 April	Northern England/Borders
Priory 87/1	13-15 April	Cumbria/Lincolnshire/North East England/ Eastern Scotland
Ardent/Ground	20 April to 10 May	Salisbury Plain
Grand Design	25 April to 17 May	Salisbury Plain
Hammer 87/1	19 May	East Anglia/Northern England/Southern Scotland
Central Enterprise 87	1 June	East Anglia/Lincolnshire/North East England/ Scotland
OSEX 14	20-24 July	South West Scotland

Exercise name	*Exercise dates*	*Exercise location*
Roaring Lion	24-31 July	Many areas with centre on Salisbury Plain
Mallet Blow 87/2	3-7 August	Northern England/Borders
Fast Buzzard	18-25 September	Many areas with centre on Salisbury Plain
Hammer 87/2	6 October	Northern England/Southern Scotland
Priory 87/2	13-15 October	East Anglia/Lincolnshire/North East England/ Eastern Scotland
Mallet Blow 87/3	2-6 November	Northern England/Borders
Puple Warrior	4-21 November	South West Scotland
1988		
Key Lift 88	5-13 March	North Yorkshire
Mallet Blow 88/1	14-18 March	Northern England/Borders
Red Lanyard	9-12 April	Many areas with centre on Salisbury Plain
Elder Forest 88	18-21 April	East Anglia/Lincolnshire/Northern England/ Eastern Scotland
Hammer 88/1	10 May	Northern England/Southern Scotland
OSEX 15	16-20 May	Wales
Roaring Lion	20-26 May	Many areas centred on Northumberland
Central Enterprise	6 June	East Anglia/Lincolnshire/Northern England/ Eastern Scotland
Fast Buzzard	13-24 July	Many areas centred on Salisbury Plain
Mallet Blow 88/2	25-29 July	Northern England/Borders
Green Lanyard	1-8 October	Many areas with centre on South West Wales
Elder Joust 88	4-6 October	East Anglia/Lincolnshire/North Eastern England/South Eastern Scotland
Hammer 88/2	11 October	East Anglia/Northern England/Southern Scotland
1989		
Red Lanyard	17-23 February	Many areas centred on Norfolk
Mallet Blow 89/1	3-7 April	Northern England/Borders
Salty Hammer 89	9 May	Northern England/Southern Scotland
Equipment Trial	25 April-19 May	Northern England/Borders
OSEX 16	10-19 May	Wales
Blue Lanyard 89	1-7 June	Many areas centred on Norfolk
Roaring Lion	11-26 July	Many areas centred on Salisbury Plain
Mallet Blow 89/2	31 July-4 August	Northern England and Borders
Elder Joust/Arc	3-5 October	Many areas of United Kingdom
Northern Crusade	11-19 October	Many areas centred on Borders
1990		
Red Lanyard 1/90	21-28 March	Many areas centred on Norfolk
Mallet Blow 90/1	26-30 March	Northern England and Borders
Elder Forest	23-27 April	Many areas of United Kingdom
Stone Warrior	12-24 May	South West England centred on Salisbury Plain
Eagles Eye	14-25 May	East Anglia
Salty Hammer	22 May	Northern England and Southern Scotland
OSEX 90	2-13 July	Wales
Red Lanyard 2/90	18-27 July	Many areas centred on South West Scotland and Norfolk
Mallet Blow 90/2	30 July-3 August	Northern England and Borders
Border fox	17-21 September	Borders
1991		
Lanyard 2	4-12 March	Wales
Elder Joust	22-25 April	Northern England
Joint Maritime Course	30 May-8 June	South West England
Highland Cardinal	24-28 June	Wales
OSEX	1-5 July	Wales
Mallet Blow	15-19 July	Northumberland
Elder Joust	10-12 September	Scottish Borders
North Star	10-12 September	Scottish Borders
1992		
Elder Forest	9-13 March	Northern England
Teamwork	9-13 March	Northern England
Highland Cardinal	11-15 May	Wales
Salty Hammer	12-13 May	Northern England
Pegasus Fury	12-28 May	Salisbury Plain
OSEX	18-22 May	Wales
Joint Maritime Course	2-11 June	Northern Scotland
Lanyard 3	8-21 July	East Anglia
Gryphon's Flight	1-10 August	Salisbury Plain
Northern Banner	7-11 September	Northern England
Winged Crusader	1-14 October	Scottish Borders
Joint Maritime Course	2-16 November	Northern Scotland
Salty Hammer	4-5 November	Northern England

Exercise name	Exercise dates	Exercise location
1993		
Joint Maritime Course	8-18 February	Northern Scotland
Lanyard 4	17-25 February	East Anglia
Northern Banner	22-26 February	Northern England
Exercise Mini Hammer	3-4 March	Northumberland
Gryphon's Lift	21-28 April	East Anglia
Lanyard 5	12-21 May	Northumberland

[1] Buccaneer, Harrier, Jaguar, Lightning, Phantom and Tornado.

Air Accidents

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the rate of major accidents per 10,000 flying hours in each year since 1987 for *(a)* Royal Air Force fast jet aircraft and *(b)* all British military fast jet aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Major accident rates per 10,000 flying hours—fast jets[1]

Year	RAF	All Services
1987	0·99	1·02
1988	0·86	0·82
1989	0·59	0·77
1990	0·72	0·76
1991	0·83	0·87
1992	0·26	0·35

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and locations of all air misses since 1989 in which a military aircraft breached an area notified under the civil aircraft notification procedure.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The only incident was:

Date, Location and Aircraft Involved

8 April 1992—16 nautical miles South West of Thurso—Tornado GR1/Jet Ranger.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date, location and type of each major accident involving British military aircraft in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Date	Service	Location	Aircraft type lost/ severely damaged
1991			
8 January	RAF	Cyprus	Phantom
10 January	Army	Saudi Arabia	Gazelle
13 January	RAF	Oman	Tornado GR1
16 January	Royal Navy	Predannack, Cornwall	Gazelle
20 January	RAF	Saudi Arabia	Tornado GR1
13 February	Army	Northern Ireland	Lynx
19 February	Army	United States of America	Scout
24 February	Army	Saudi Arabia	Lynx
18 March	RAF	RAF Wyton, Cambridgeshire	Canberra
1 May	RAF	Tern Hill, Shropshire	Gazelle
10 May	RAF	Near Bremen, Germany	Tornado GR1
10 May	Royal Navy	Near Chepstow, Gwent	Sea Harrier
29 May	RAF	Near Gutersloh, Germany	Harrier
1 June	Royal Navy	Bangladesh	Sea King
3 June	Army	Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire	Gazelle
24 June	RAF	At sea, Straits of Dover	Puma
29 August	RAF	Carno, Powys	Jaguar
10 September	Royal Navy	West of Shetland Islands	Sea King
11 September	RAF	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire	Hurricane
12 September	RAF	Bristol Channel	Tornado GR1
25 September	RAF	Near Driffield, Humberside	Harrier
30 September	RAF	RAF Gutersloh, Germany	Harrier
15 October	RAF	RAF Odiham, Hampshire	Chinook
30 October	RAF	Falkland Islands	Phantom
30 October	Army	Northern Ireland	Gazelle
14 November	Army	Northern Ireland	Lynx
1992			
15 February	Royal Navy	At sea, off North West Scotland	Hunter
12 May	Army	Germany	Lynx
12 May	RAF	Near Lossiemouth, Scotland	Tucano
14 May	RAF	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire	Harrier
21 May	RAF	Belize	Puma
28 May	Royal Navy	At sea, near Crete	Sea Harrier
9 July	RAF	North Sea	Buccaneer
7 August	RAF	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire	Harrier
22 September	RAF	Irish Sea	Sea King
30 September	RAF	RAF Chivenor, Devon	Hawk
16 October	RAF	Northern Ireland	Bulldog
26 November	Army/RAF	Northern Ireland	Gazelle/Puma

Date	Service	Location	Aircraft type lost/ severely damaged
30 November	Army	Cyprus	Gazelle
15 December	Army	Germany	Gazelle

Note: 1991 does not include the six aircraft lost on missions over Iraq during hostilities in the Gulf.

HMS Eaglet

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of HMS Eaglet and the Royal Naval Reserve in Liverpool.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on 20 April, *Official Report*, columns *169-70*, and to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) on 20 April, *Official Report*, column *54*.

Hunting

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the percentage increase in the cost of licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land in 1991-92; and when the cost of licences was previously increased.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Each licence issued by my Department is costed separately. The total amount received by my Department for these licences in 1991-92 was £729·85 which represent an increase of some 973 per cent. over the amount received in 1990-91. The charge for individual licences are reviewed at different times.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those areas designated as sites of special scientific interest where his Department has issued a licence to hunt.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department has issued licences to hunt on the following areas which include sites of special scientific interest.

Otterburn, Northumberland[1]
Ash Brookwood Heaths, Surrey
Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths, Berkshire/ Surrey
Thursley Hankley and Frensham, Surrey
Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire
Basingstoke Canal Eelmoor, Hampshire
Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath, Surrey
Conford Moor, Hampshire
Woolmer Forest, Hampshire

[1] The Otterburn Training Area includes 10 sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Army personnel from the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, are permitted to hunt in duty hours.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personnel from the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, are permitted to take part in beagling in duty hours, which is a recognised Army sport.

Costs

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the charges for personnel from non-mounted units to use Ministry of Defence horses and equipment were last reviewed; when they were last increased; and whether the charges reflect the full economic cost to his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The charges for personnel from non-mounted units for the use of Ministry of Defence horses and equipment were last reviewed in October 1992 following an increase in July 1991. The charges are set so as to recover the additional costs involved.

Military Bands

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what briefings were given in the first three months of last year by senior officers to military bandsmen on the effect of a change of Government on the number of military bands.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Operation Epsilon

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to the security implications of releasing transcripts of the Farm Hall tapes of conversations of German atomic scientists in the second world war recorded under Operation Epsilon, prior to their release.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The documents were originally "retained by Department" under section 3(4) of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967 on the grounds of national security. They were reviewed in 1992, and it was judged all sensitivity had lapsed and that they could be released into the public domain.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Meteorological Office executive agency for the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The agency has been set a range of quality and financial targets to ensure that it delivers progressive improvements in the provision of weather related services.

The key quality targets set for the Meteorological Office during the period 1993-94 are to achieve 80 per cent. of all business area targets for customer satisfaction, forecast accuracy and timeliness; produce a charter standard for public services; provide timely and apt advice on meteorology and climate issues to Ministers and the general public; to progress the research programme and to satisfy customer requirements to schedule and agreed standards; and to initiate a rolling programme of reviews of scientific and technical standards throughout the agency.

The financial targets are to reduce net operating costs to £45,700,000—a 1 per cent. reduction on the 1992-93 budget; increase efficiency by 2.5 per cent. through improvements in quality of service, increased volume of service and reduced unit costs; achieve an 8 per cent. increase in uptake of meteorological services to £18,600,000, as measured by cash revenue generated from commercial services to the public, industry and commerce, excluding the Civil Aviation Authority and Department of the Environment; achieve a 19 per cent. increase to £6,700,000 in the gross contribution of commercial services invoiced revenue to offsetting core costs and overheads.

It is also planned that the output costs of all key activities using the new financial and management information system will be made available in 1993-94.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Disablement Pensioners

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what savings he expects to make from the abolition of the lump-sum payments to war disablement pensioners with a noise-induced hearing loss assessed at less than 20 per cent;

(2) if he will estimate the number of ex-service personnel with a noise-induced hearing loss of less than 20 per cent. who will no longer be eligible for support following changes to the war disablement pension scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: The assumption underlying the policy decision was that, in 1993-94, some 10,000 people would not qualify under the new rules who would have qualified under the old, resulting in savings of £20 million which have been used to meet the estimated cost of removing completely rank differentials in war disablement pensions from 12 April 1993.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number of existing war disablement pensioners will receive uprating of £5 per week; what number will receive the uprating of 84p per week; and what number will receive the intermediate upratings of their pension.

Miss Widdecombe: As a result of the abolition of rank differentials from 12 April 1993, an increase of up to £5 a week has been paid to war disablement pensioners depending on their previous rank and level of disablement; for example, a 100 per cent. disabled ex-private will have received an extra £5 a week, whilst a 40 per cent. disabled ex-sergeant will have received an extra £1·86. About 200,000 pensioners have benefited from this change, the most severely disabled lower ranks getting the most. These increases are additional to the general increase in war pensions of 3·6 per cent. under the normal uprating. Precise detail of the numbers in each of the many categories concerned is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The previously announced increase of 84p per week related to the war disablement pensions of non-commissioned officers only and was subsumed in the increases consequential upon the total abolition of rank differentials.

Income Support

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the £5 earnings disregard for unemployed people who are receiving income support applies to the earnings of each individual member of a two-person household; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The £5 disregard applies individually to each member of a couple; where both partners undertake part-time employment, the total disregard available on their earnings is therefore £10.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants who were *(a)* unemployed people claiming income support and/or unemployment benefit, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* people receiving a disability premium, *(d)* people receiving severe disablement allowance and *(e)* people receiving invalidity benefit declared part-time earnings; what are the average weekly earnings declared; and what proportion such claimants represent of claimants in the group at the latest available date and in comparable periods since 1988.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is in the tables. Information is provided for 1989—the earliest year for which income support information is readily available—1990 and 1991, the latest years available.

Income Support recipients with declared earnings

	Number of cases with declared earnings	*Percentage*	*Average declared earnings £ per week*
May 1991			
(a) Unemployed[1]	25,000	2·0	21·78
(a) Unemployed[2]	1,000	1·1	24·04
(b) Lone parents	78,000	9·0	27·53
(c) Disabled	4,000	0·9	14·14
(d) Severe Disablement Allowance	1,000	0·6	3·23
(e) Invalidity Benefit	1,000	0·6	14·84
Total Income Support recipients	117,000	2·6	25·29
May 1990			
(a) Unemployed[1]	26,000	2·5	22·16
(a) Unemployed[2]	1,000	2·0	28·18
(b) Lone parents	80,000	10·1	25·82
(c) Disabled	6,000	1·7	12·31
(d) Severe Disablement Allowance	1,000	1·3	33·19
(e) Invalidity Benefit	—	—	—
Total Income Support recipients	124,000	3·0	23·65
May 1989			
(a) Unemployed[1]	31,000	2·8	19·22
(a) Unemployed[2]	1,000	1·4	19·60
(b) Lone parents	82,000	10·9	24·71
(c) Disabled	6,000	2·0	5·77
(d) Severe Disablement Allowance	1,000	1·0	5·83
(e) Invalidity Benefit	—	—	—
Total Income Support recipients	130,000	3·1	21·73

[1] No Unemployment Benefit.
[2] With Unemployment Benefit.

Source: Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry, May 1991, May 1990 and May 1989.

Notes: All figures rounded to nearest thousand; percentages correct

to one decimal place; average earnings correct to nearest penny.
"Lone parents" in the tables means people aged under 60 who are entitled to a lone parent premium and who do not receive a disability premium.
"Disabled" in the tables means people aged under 60 who are entitled to the disability premium.
There will be some overlap between groups *(c)*, *(d)* and *(e)* in the tables.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the £15 earnings disregard for people who are receiving income support, either because they have a disability premium or are part of a long-term unemployed couple, applies to the earnings of each individual member of a two-person household; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Where a couple qualify for this disregard, the total amount of earnings that can be disregarded is £15 for the couple.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of sickness benefit at the end of each month since April 1991.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table, and is obtained from a 100 per cent. count of cases by benefit offices at the end of each month, rounded to the nearest thousand. The figures include cases registered sick that are not receiving sickness benefit but are receiving income support and national insurance credits.

Date	*Sickness Benefit*
May 1991	433,000
June 1991	421,000
July 1991	431,000
August 1991	430,000
September 1991	438,000
October 1991	434,000
November 1991	445,000
December 1991	449,000
January 1992	461,000
February 1992	474,000
March 1992	479,000
April 1992	465,000
May 1992	472,000
June 1992	472,000
July 1992	487,000
August 1992	489,000
September 1992	496,000
October 1992	505,000
November 1992	513,000
December 1992	521,000
January 1993	525,000
February 1993	535,000
March 1993	538,000

Note: These figures are derived from a physical count and may be subject to occasional revision.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he proposes to take to equalise the treatment of men and women in receipt of invalidity benefit following the ruling of the European Court of Justice on 30 March.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 26 April 1993, at columns *311-12*.

Pension Funds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the commission chaired by Professor Goode, currently looking into pension funds, is expected to report; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) on 30 March, at column *172*.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of the lost Maxwell pension funds has now been located; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that the liquidators of Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd., which managed Maxwell pension scheme funds, have located and secured assets presently worth some £300 million. The Department's Maxwell pensions unit are continuing to assist where practicable with the liquidators' work.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will meet representatives of organisations of Maxwell pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: This month I have two meetings with hon. Members and representatives of Maxwell pensionsers. The Department's Maxwell pensions unit regularly meets the various Maxwell pensioners' action groups.

Appeals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals are presently outstanding at each Independent Tribunal Service office; and what additional resources have been provided to this service since April 1992.

Mr. Burt: The appeals outstanding at 31 March 1993 in each region of the Independent Tribunal Service and the disability tribunals central office are in the table. The budget for ITS for 1992-93 was £33·09 million. For 1993-94 the budget is £46·68 million. The additional resources of £13·59 million take account of increased caseloads for social security appeals tribunals, medical appeals tribunals, and disability appeals tribunals, and the establishment of child support appeal tribunals.

ITS Office/Region	*SSAT*	*MAT*	*DAT*
North-East	11,303	3,578	—
Midlands	7,088	1,620	—
South-East	11,594	1,961	—
Wales and South-West	4,504	1,433	—
North-West	8,276	2,806	—
Scotland	16,929	932	—
DATCO	—	—	2,301
Total	59,694	12,330	2,301

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current waiting time for *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* mobility allowance and *(c)* disability living allowance from application for appeal application to appeal hearings.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. However, for the quarter ending 30 June 1992,

the latest period for which figures are available, the average time taken from an appeal application to a final hearing was:

	Weeks
(a) Attendance allowance	26·7
(b) Mobility allowance	23·8
(c) Disability living allowance	17·9

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the names and contact addresses for all Independent Tribunal Service regional chairmen.

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

South-east Region
Mr. R. G. Smithson—Whittington House, 19-30 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7LW

Wales and South-west
Mr. C. B. Stevens—Oxford House, Hill Street, The Hayes, Cardiff CF1 2DR

Midlands
Mr. I. Harrison—Albion House, 3rd Floor, 5-13 Canal Street, Nottingham NG1 7EG

North-east Region
Mr. J. Tinnion—Third Floor, York House, York Place, Leeds LS1 2ED

North-west Region
Mr. R. Sim, 36 Dale Street, Liverpool L2 5UZ

Scotland
Mrs. L. T. Parker—Blythswood House, 200 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 4SS

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 May 1993

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretry of State for Defence what are the weather minima for low-flying training below 250 ft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The weather minima for all military low flying training in the United Kingdom low flying system are as follows:

(a) All aircraft flying in the system faster than 140 kts must maintain 5 km visibility, 1500 m horizontal and 500 ft vertical separation from cloud.

(b) Aircraft, other than helicopters, flying at 140 kts or slower must maintain either 5 km visibility, 1500 m horizontal and 500 ft vertical separation from cloud or 2 km visibility, clear of cloud and in sight of the surface.

(c) Helicopters flying at 140 kts or slower must maintain either 5 km visibility, 1500 m horizontal and 500 ft vertical separation from cloud or keep clear of cloud and keep in sight of the surface.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretry of State for Defence how many movements into low-flying areas at less than 250 ft above ground level were authorised in each year since 1987.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of movements authorised for flying below 250 ft in the three United Kingdom tactical areas each year since 1987 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	1,386
1988	2,115
1989	2,694
1990	6,027
1991	1,814
1992	3,220

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the military low level training sorties flown over the United Kingdom in each year since 1987 included authorisation to fly at *(a)* 200 ft above ground and *(b)* 100 ft above ground level.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures for low-flying sorties that have been flown below 250 ft are not available. The proportion of low-flying training movements authorised for flying below 250 ft, for each year since 1987, is given in the table. Such flights may be authorised down to a minimum level of 100 ft but records do not distinguish between levels within the 250 ft to 100 ft band.

Year	*Per cent.*
1987	0·43
1988	0·69
1989	0·88
1990	1·92
1991	0·72
1992	1·15

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force fast jet pilots are currently qualified to fly at 100 ft above ground level.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not available.

Saudi Arabia (Arms Contract)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated final value of the Al-Yamamah arms contract with Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Aitken: Al-Yamamah is a continuing programme, with no specified end point, so it is not possible to estimate its final value. Purchases by the Saudi Arabian Government under the agreement are, of course, a matter for them.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which AWE sites are covered in his evidence to the Select Committee on Defence, in the answer on page 66 of HC 237 of Session 1989-90.

Mr. Aitken: The AWE sites are covered in evidence given to the Defence Select Committee in report HC 237 1989-90 were AWE Aldermaston, AWE Burghfield, AWE Cardiff and AWE Foulness.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom nuclear tests are scheduled to take place before September 1996.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 12 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *881*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Abducted Children

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will seek a meeting with the Spanish ambassador regarding the position of British children abducted to Spain.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Spain is a signatory to both the Hague and European conventions on child abduction. Since central authorities remain in close contact with each other, there are no plans for such a meeting at this time.

EDUCATION

Student Loans

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to lay before the House revised student loans regulations, and if he will give details of the new loan rates for 1993-94.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland have laid the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1993 before Parliament today.

The loans regulations provide for the new higher rates of loan. For the academic year beginning in September 1993 the maximum rates of loan in the United Kingdom will be as follows:

Loan rates 1993-94	*Full year rate (£)*	*Final year rate (£)*
Students living away from parents home:		
In London	940	685
Elsewhere	800	585
Students living at parents home	640	470

Apart from technical amendments, the one change to the loans scheme included in the regulations this year provides for students following two-year degree courses, and one accelerated three-year course, to claim the full-year rate of loan if their final year lasts for 40 weeks or more.

TRANSPORT

Road Improvements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on the measures which he has introduced and is intending to introduce to increase developer contributions to road improvements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend published a consultation document last August following an efficiency scrutiny report on developers' contributions to highway works. This set out proposals to facilitate developments that otherwise may be postponed or prevented because of inadequate road capacity. The responses to the consultation document are still being examined. A further statement will be made once that examination has been concluded.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, column *401*, if he will name the firm of consulting engineers appointed as the Government's agent.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: G. Maunsell and Partners.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the overall average period of service in one episode of employment;

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women work in (i) manufacturing industry and (ii) the retail trades; what percentage of the work force these figures represent; and what is the average length of time spent by each sex in each category of employment.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information available for both questions, from the labour force survey, is given in the tables:

Persons in employment by sex and industry, Autumn 1992 Great Britain (not seasonally adjusted)
Numbers of persons in employment (thousands)

	All industries	*Manufacturing industry*	*Retail trade*
Men	13,779	3,754	1,114
Women	11,188	1,462	1,699
All persons	24,967	5,217	2,813
As a proportion of all in employment (per cent.)			
Men	55·2	15·0	4·5
Women	44·8	5·6	6·8
All persons	100·0	20·6	11·3
Average length of time in current employment (years)			
Men	9	9	7
Women	6	7	5
All persons	8	9	6

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people were quarterly attenders in each month since January 1981; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 7 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about the number of unemployed people who were quarterly attenders in each month since January 1981. This is something which falls within the responsibilities she has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, I am only able to provide the information you requested from April 1986 as data prior to that date can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Quarterly Attenders—April 1986 to March 1993

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
April	290,351	281,871	257,328	206,921	135,321	87,060	59,113
May	286,833	270,723	249,148	191,929	123,922	80,125	54,406
June	290,295	270,862	250,646	188,289	120,040	78,713	53,670
July	292,012	269,103	248,932	183,614	115,573	75,696	52,748
August	290,824	264,811	245,031	177,210	110,581	72,766	50,330
September	295,138	266,475	245,460	170,150	107,917	70,736	49,732
October	295,275	266,066	241,580	159,927	104,956	69,464	48,672

	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
November	291,077	260,594	232,315	150,536	99,451	66,259	46,915
December	293,316	261,563	227,964	147,294	97,366	65,195	46,409
January	290,536	257,897	222,289	144,090	95,625	64,214	44,964
February	282,125	255,867	212,927	138,753	91,665	61,725	43,242
March	281,817	258,871	212,094	136,626	98,756	60,617	42,845

Careers Guidance Diploma

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 21 April, *Official Report*, column *130*, on the careers guidance diploma, how many students are studying part-time; and what are the figures for Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: Further to my reply to the hon. Member of 21 April 1993, column *130*, I have obtained from the local government management board the following information:

Number of students in United Kingdom currently studying part-time for Part 1 of the Diploma in Careers guidance, 90.

Of these, the number studying in Scotland, 5.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations she undertook prior to turning the post of chair of the Health and Safety Executive from a full-time position to a part-time one; and what impact she estimates this will have on the work of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. McLoughlin: The decision to make the next chair of the Health and Safety Commission a part-time appointment reflects the loading of the post in current circumstances. Those circumstances include the strengthening of the senior management structure of the Health and Safety Executive last year, when a second full-time deputy director general was appointed to work with the existing full-time director general and deputy. The work of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive remains unchanged.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current number of job vacancies in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. McLoughlin: In March 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of unfilled vacancies in jobcentres covering the Greater Manchester area was 4,840. This figure has not been seasonally adjusted.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the importance and on the future role of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. McLoughlin: The future role of the Health and Safety Executive will be to continue its good work in promoting health and safety in the workplace while ensuring businesses are not burdened with unnecessary bureaucracy.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Deficit Funding

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 April, *Official Report*, column *480*, to what extent he is currently underfunding the deficit.

Mr. Nelson: The Government are pursuing their full fund policy, as set out in the "Financial and Budget Report 1993-94".

Central Bank Advances

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other European Community Governments make use of advances from their central banks similar to the ways and means advances to Her Majesty's Government from the Bank of England.

Mr. Nelson: The public sector in most other European Community countries makes use of advances from its central bank. Details are given in the 1992 annual report of the committee of governors of the central banks of the member states of the European Economic Community. A copy of this document is available in the Library.

Ways and Means Advances

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 April, *Official Report*, columns *480-81* on ways and means advances, if he will give the actual advances from the Bank of England outstanding at the last working day of the last six financial years and the interest rate payable at that time on such advances.

Mr. Nelson: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Level of Ways and Means[1] advances outstanding from the Bank of England £ million*	*Interest[1] percentage*
1987-88	4,638	8·375
1988-89	6,256	12·875
1989-90	5,963	14·875
1990-91	6,918	12·875
1991-92	7,187	10·375
[2]1992-93	3,062	5·875

[1] Level of Ways and Means, rounded to the nearest million, and interest payable as at the last working day of each financial year.
[2] (Provisional).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 April, *Official Report*, column *481*, on ways and means advances, why interest is paid on such advances; and what proposals he has to arrange for the Bank of England not to charge such interest.

Mr. Nelson: Interest is payable to the Bank of England on ways and means advances, and payable by the Bank of England on deposits when the national loans fund is in surplus. It is appropriate for national loans fund borrowing from, and lending to, the Bank of England to be at interest.

There are no proposals to change the arrangements for charging interest.

Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will table a new statutory instrument to replace the Industrial and Provident Societies (Increase in Shareholding Limit) Order 1981 (SI, 1981, No. 395) in order to increase the current £10,000 limit on shareholdings in industrial and provident societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I have no immediate plans to do so, although the Treasury keeps the limit on shareholdings in industrial and provident societies under review at all times.

Conditionally Exempt Property

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that, where the owner of conditionally exempt property is required to sell part of it under the provisions of the Housing and Urban Development Bill, there should be no review of the designation of the whole of the property.

Mr. Dorrell: Where there is a disposal of part of a property which is conditionally exempt from inheritance tax, the conditional exemption designation of the whole property is reviewed. If the disposal has not materially affected the heritage entity, the designation for the remainder remains in force and the inheritance tax charge is limited to the part disposal.

Following consideration of representations received, the Government propose that, where a part disposal results solely from leasehold enfranchisement under the Housing and Urban Development Bill, or the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, and there is no breach of undertakings in respect of the retained property, there should be no review of designation of the retained property. In these circumstances, the inheritance tax charge will be limited to the part disposal.

A new clause to the Finance (No. 2) Bill 1993 will be tabled shortly on this proposal.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the projects funded by the Overseas Development Association for Indonesia; to what extent Indonesia's human rights record has affected the level of aid that it receives; and what representations have been made to Indonesia on human rights matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are two main elements of ODA's aid programme for Indonesia—projects supported under the aid and trade provision, essentially through the concessional loan arrangements signed since 1986, and technical co-operation projects funded on a grant basis.

In the first group of projects currently at the implementation stage are the rehabilitation and upgrading of 140 km of rail line, a new 17 km rail spur, both in west Java, provision of Bailey-type steel bridging, a radio communication system for the Ministry of Forestry, airport security systems for the Medan and Bali international airports, a flight simulator for a domestic civilian airline, shortwave radio transmitters for the national broadcasting service, equipment and a training centre for universities in western Indonesia and diesel power units for central Sumatra.

Technical co-operation projects under implementation are in the sectors of natural resources, including particularly forestry, energy—both gas and power—education, public administration, and training.

ODA also supports the work of non-governmental organisations in Indonesia.

Decisions on the level of aid for Indonesia, as for all countries, are taken after consideration of all relevant factors, including human rights.

We frequently express to the Indonesian Government our continuing concern at human rights matters, both in Ministers' meetings with their Indonesian counterparts and in representations here and through the embassy in Jakarta. The most recent occasion was when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Indonesia in early April.

Family Planning (China)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what information he has received from the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities on the activities of the Chinese Family Planning Association and the Chinese State Family Planning Commission; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has held with the IPPF and UNFPA concerning coercive population control in China; and if he will make a statement;

(3) further to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *363*, on the work of IPPF and UNFPA, what information his Department receives from these organisations between their annual conferences.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The Overseas Development Administration receives various information from, and is in regular consultation with, IPPF and UNFPA about China's population programme and the technical and financial assistance they provide to China's Family Planning Association and State Family Planning Commission.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he takes in making grants to the population control work of IPPF and UNFPA of Chinese state laws prescribing mandatory abortifacient contraception, sterilisation and abortion.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* ODA provides grants to IPPF and UNFPA in support of their worldwide activities. ODA, IPPF and UNFPA all believe that women and men should be able to choose whether to have, or not to have, children without any form of coercion.

The British Government attach importance to China adopting powerful directives from the centre to eliminate coercive practices and human rights violations in its

population programme. IPPF and UNFPA endorse this view and are in regular dialogue with the Chinese Government.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Eritrea

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will announce Her Majesty's Government's policy on the recognition of Eritrea following its referendum result.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We warmly welcome the outcome of the referendum on Eritrea's status. United Nations observers have confirmed their satisfaction with the process. This opens the way for recognition of Eritrea.

The Eritreans have announced that their independence will be formally declared on 24 May. Accordingly, we plan to announce our decision on diplomatic recognition on that occasion.

Malawi

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made to Malawi about human rights in Malawi during the recent United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: During our presidency, the EC made two demarches to the Malawian Government about human rights. On 4 August a demarche expressed concern at the re-arrest of Chakufwa Chihana following his earlier release on bail. On 20 October, a further demarche detailed EC member states' continued concerns over human rights and in particular called for greater police accountability and freedom of expression, both of which the EC consider to be prerequisites for the lifting of the restrictions on non-humanitarian aid to the country, imposed by donors in May 1992.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce the Government's proposals on Sunday trading in the next session of Parliament; and if he will present a Bill before Christmas 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We shall make available a draft Bill together with a text explaining the effects of its provisions before the summer recess. The Bill will be ready for introduction early next Session, when parliamentary time allows. Details of Bills for introduction in the next Session will be given in the Queen's Speech.

Motor Vehicle Offences

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* thefts of a motor vehicle and *(b)* thefts from a motor vehicle were committed in the Greater Manchester area in each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is published annually in table 3.1 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Volume 3", copies of which are available in the Library.

Primates

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *372*, if he is now able to provide information on the proportion of primates used in British research which are *(a)* wild caught, *(b)* captive bred outside the United Kingdom and *(c)* captive bred in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office scientific procedures inspectorate has, since the answer of 22 October 1992, completed a survey of the holding of larger primates in 1992. This indicated that the proportion of captive-bred larger primates held, though not necessarily used, is now 80 per cent.

The breakdown by species in 1992 was as follows:

Species	*Number held*	*Number captive bred*	*Percentage captive bred*
Cynomolgus	2,689	2,143	79·7
Rhesus	919	878	95·5
Baboon	175	0	0
Stump/Pigtail	81	79	97·5
Others	6	6	100

It is not possible, from the information available, to distinguish between those animals which were captive-bred in the United Kingdom and those which were captive-bred elsewhere.

No precise information is available in respect of smaller primates, although it is believed that the great majority of those used will have been captive-bred in this country.

Replica Firearms

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes involving the use of replica firearms have been committed in each police authority area in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: Figures for offences involving imitation firearms in England and Wales are set out in the table. These figures include replica firearms and all other types of imitation firearms, including toys.

Figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and figures for Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in which imitation firearms were reported to have been used in England and Wales

Police force	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	—	4	1	9	7
Bedfordshire	2	3	7	3	5
Cambridgeshire	2	1	4	10	5
Cheshire	—	2	3	8	13
Cleveland	1	—	1	—	1
Cumbria	—	2	2	6	5
Derbyshire	3	4	2	4	5
Devon and Cornwall	7	4	9	4	8
Dorset	1	1	5	2	2
Durham	1	3	—	1	6
Essex	5	16	7	12	11
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	3
Greater Manchester	13	20	21	22	22
Hampshire	12	7	17	19	21
Hertfordshire	3	2	5	2	7

Police force	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Humberside	6	6	9	—	14
Kent	10	12	11	8	7
Lancashire	4	—	—	7	9
Leicestershire	9	4	10	11	11
Lincolnshire	1	—	—	—	—
London, City of	6	1	5	1	1
Merseyside	13	17	12	23	10
Metropolitan	95	87	107	108	112
Norfolk	2	2	2	1	1
Northamptonshire	3	2	1	1	4
Northumbria	5	4	9	17	21
North Yorkshire	1	—	2	2	3
Nottinghamshire	7	5	5	8	10
South Yorkshire	4	6	11	10	17
Staffordshire	1	2	2	3	2
Suffolk	3	5	2	2	7
Surrey	2	3	4	4	2
Sussex	9	8	12	18	17
Thames Valley	6	13	14	28	28
Warwickshire	—	4	2	1	3
West Mercia	4	3	4	2	2
West Midlands	19	23	27	25	41
West Yorkshire	13	13	15	13	15
Wiltshire	—	—	2	3	—
Dyfed Powys	1	1	1	1	2
Gwent	2	—	3	11	1
North Wales	—	2	6	3	11
South Wales	1	3	3	7	9
England and Wales	277	295	365	420	481

War Crimes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on war crimes investigations since enactment of the War Crimes Act 1991; and with what results.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Expenditure so far incurred under the War Crimes Act 1991 is estimated at £3·21 million. Investigations have been undertaken into over 350 allegations and inquiries are still continuing in 75 cases. As yet, no prosecutions have been started under the Act.

Crime Statistics

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each police authority in England for the most recent three years for which figures are available *(a)* the number of recorded crimes, *(b)* the ratio of recorded crimes to population, *(c)* the number of cleared up crimes and *(d)* the ratio of crimes cleared up to crimes committed; and if he will give the corresponding figures for 1978-79.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is supplied in the following tables. The number of crimes committed is not available, so the number of crimes recorded is used in the clear-up ratio.

1978

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1978	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1978	Percentage cleared up
Avon and Somerset	53,071	3,981	22,339	42
Bedfordshire	24,506	4,954	11,221	46
Cambridgeshire	28,317	4,966	15,571	55
Cheshire	26,436	2,874	15,547	59
Cleveland	33,222	5,847	18,143	55
Cumbria	18,498	3,916	9,999	54
Derbyshire	35,759	3,990	16,042	45
Devon and Cornwall	41,941	3,073	19,149	46
Dorset	24,608	4,196	11,614	47
Durham	25,863	4,283	13,212	51
Essex	50,262	3,679	21,871	44
Gloucestershire	16,120	3,255	8,225	51
Greater Manchester	151,192	5,676	69,183	46
Hampshire	62,750	4,003	28,681	46
Hertfordshire	35,649	4,434	18,156	51
Humberside	42,773	5,062	19,416	45
Kent	52,602	3,630	21,136	40
Lancashire	48,984	3,577	26,933	55
Leicestershire	29,254	3,511	16,591	57
Lincolnshire	16,436	3,101	9,434	57
City of London	5,886	[3]—	1,379	23
Merseyside	106,083	6,864	45,301	43
Metropolitan Police District	533,025	7,203	114,214	21
Norfolk	22,245	3,272	10,950	49
Northamptonshire	21,959	4,252	11,020	50
Northumbria	92,352	6,350	47,382	51
North Yorkshire	21,605	3,267	11,294	52
Nottinghamshire	68,903	7,076	34,066	49
South Yorkshire	53,040	4,067	28,235	53
Staffordshire	33,927	3,403	18,556	55
Suffolk	17,640	2,976	9,730	55
Surrey	24,732	3,409	12,154	49
Sussex	43,988	3,420	24,729	56
Thames Valley	71,681	4,124	30,531	43
Warwickshire	13,440	2,863	6,210	46
West Mercia	31,816	3,260	15,384	48
West Midlands	151,685	5,594	52,039	34
West Yorkshire	122,874	5,942	60,250	49
Wiltshire	20,125	3,899	8,814	44
Dyfed-Powys	10,794	2,504	6,924	64
Gwent	18,810	4,295	11,139	59
North Wales	23,520	3,865	13,564	58
South Wales	67,384	5,222	31,325	46
Total	2,395,757	4,878	997,653	42

[1] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[2] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[3] Included in the Metropolitan Police District.

1979

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1979	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1979	Percentage cleared up
Avon and Somerset	48,443	3,616	21,010	43
Bedfordshire	26,403	5,293	12,752	48
Cambridgeshire	23,461	4,050	10,967	47
Cheshire	28,285	3,053	16,524	58
Cleveland	32,802	5,769	16,671	51
Cumbria	18,130	3,858	10,132	56
Derbyshire	35,160	3,914	17,688	50
Devon and Cornwall	41,231	3,006	19,001	46
Dorset	22,278	3,769	10,359	46
Durham	25,033	4,150	12,942	52
Essex	51,077	3,708	21,488	42
Gloucestershire	15,385	3,095	7,910	51
Greater Manchester	160,268	6,052	72,843	45
Hampshire	62,062	3,941	28,255	46
Hertfordshire	35,815	4,430	19,296	54
Humberside	44,502	5,238	19,926	45
Kent	50,959	3,500	25,469	50
Lancashire	51,735	3,777	28,791	56
Leicestershire	28,984	3,466	15,541	54
Lincolnshire	16,229	3,040	9,703	60
City of London	6,663	[3]	1,375	[3]
Merseyside	104,369	6,814	44,351	42
Metropolitan Police District	524,138	7,123	108,907	21
Norfolk	21,161	3,083	9,983	47
Northamptonshire	21,568	4,122	10,262	48
Northumbria	93,832	6,490	49,359	53
North Yorkshire	20,260	3,055	10,342	51
Nottinghamshire	69,879	7,174	35,340	51
South Yorkshire	52,767	4,055	27,055	51
Staffordshire	35,718	3,572	18,232	51
Suffolk	18,804	3,147	10,625	57
Surrey	25,407	3,505	11,856	47

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1979	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1979	Percentage cleared up
Sussex	45,962	3,540	24,562	53
Thames Valley	71,778	4,079	32,194	45
Warwickshire	13,156	2,806	6,080	46
West Mercia	31,125	3,152	15,264	49
West Midlands	147,080	5,455	54,702	37
West Yorkshire	118,418	5,737	43,702	37
Wiltshire	18,871	3,654	7,882	42
Dyfed-Powys	10,525	2,432	6,575	62
Gwent	18,814	4,316	11,204	60
North Wales	22,395	3,663	13,269	59
South Wales	65,734	5,077	30,294	46
Total	2,376,666	4,833	980,683	41

[1] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[2] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[3] Included in the Metropolitan Police District.

1990

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1990	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1990	Percentage cleared up
Avon and Somerset	124,177	8,784	35,395	29
Bedfordshire	52,862	9,952	11,712	22
Cambridgeshire	44,035	6,722	16,546	38
Cheshire	51,627	5,386	25,667	50
Cleveland	70,622	12,774	17,351	25
Cumbria	31,922	6,493	13,855	43
Derbyshire	56,557	6,085	18,228	32
Devon and Cornwall	90,403	6,051	28,644	32
Dorset	47,282	7,199	16,637	35
Durham	49,957	8,369	16,818	34
Essex	93,544	6,389	26,868	29
Gloucestershire	41,772	7,889	13,819	33
Greater Manchester	312,332	12,095	100,074	32
Hampshire	116,773	6,966	37,253	32
Hertfordshire	45,166	5,373	13,324	30
Humberside	101,279	11,828	37,699	37
Kent	99,179	6,509	24,370	25
Lancashire	92,985	6,686	40,969	44
Leicestershire	71,981	8,070	25,820	36
Lincolnshire[1]	38,034	6,481	16,449	43
City of London	7,072	[3]165,737	1,480	21
Merseyside	129,876	8,969	57,542	44
Metropolitan Police District	810,443	11,220	137,075	17
Norfolk	53,982	7,212	20,145	37
Northamptonshire	47,392	8,227	16,711	35
Northumbria	190,248	13,288	76,654	40
North Yorkshire	44,465	6,156	17,726	40
Nottinghamshire	128,548	12,667	44,711	35
South Yorkshire	102,161	7,888	45,450	44
Staffordshire	70,718	6,806	27,892	39
Suffolk	36,451	5,686	14,842	41
Surrey	41,681	5,604	11,050	27
Sussex	93,418	6,594	24,534	26
Thames Valley	145,977	7,446	38,175	26
Warwickshire	32,419	6,711	9,504	29
West Mercia	59,332	5,501	27,128	46
West Midlands	257,814	9,858	92,723	36
West Yorkshire	227,631	11,015	77,073	34
Wiltshire	32,449	5,811	14,196	44
Dyfed-Powys	19,568	4,169	9,835	50
Gwent	30,169	6,752	15,481	51
North Wales	36,153	5,546	14,629	40
South Wales	133,176	10,205	47,459	36
Total	4,363,632	8,630	1,379,423	32

[1] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[2] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[3] The City of London rate per 100,000 population figure is affected by the low resident population.

1991

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1991	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1991	Percentage cleared up
Avon and Somerset	151,071	10,662	35,575	24
Bedfordshire	56,597	10,569	10,948	19
Cambridgeshire	57,396	8,637	20,588	36
Cheshire	61,901	6,455	25,172	41
Cleveland	74,424	13,480	24,817	33
Cumbria	42,627	8,662	17,195	40
Derbyshire	71,853	7,701	20,065	28
Devon and Cornwall	106,926	7,138	31,019	29
Dorset	51,081	7,759	21,091	41
Durham	60,717	10,130	18,328	30
Essex	106,109	7,240	33,518	32
Gloucestershire	55,317	10,410	19,575	35
Greater Manchester	353,177	13,633	126,464	36
Hampshire	140,182	8,360	39,741	28
Hertfordshire	54,629	6,482	18,239	33
Humberside	116,115	13,515	36,648	32
Kent	134,197	8,797	30,608	23
Lancashire	106,045	7,600	42,563	40
Leicestershire	88,890	9,902	25,574	29
Lincolnshire	43,678	7,387	20,152	46
City of London	7,551	[3]191,213	1,526	20
Merseyside	143,247	9,922	63,804	45
Metropolitan Police District	883,934	12,175	149,016	17
Norfolk	63,575	8,469	23,281	37
Northamptonshire	57,756	9,956	17,782	31
Northumbria	208,888	14,589	73,796	35
North Yorkshire	49,869	6,865	18,015	36
Nottinghamshire	145,903	14,353	38,695	27
South Yorkshire	118,972	9,178	42,582	36
Staffordshire	84,296	8,100	31,534	37
Suffolk	39,175	6,085	14,626	37
Surrey	49,252	6,592	11,249	23
Sussex	110,931	7,828	25,077	23
Thames Valley	185,262	9,340	40,285	22
Warwickshire	40,091	8,307	9,641	24
West Mercia	71,420	6,605	25,232	35
West Midlands	294,704	11,271	90,344	31
West Yorkshire	288,745	13,948	79,663	28
Wiltshire	38,276	6,812	15,460	40
Dyfed-Powys	24,411	5,178	12,261	50
Gwent	37,222	8,317	17,487	47
North Wales	42,672	6,536	15,523	36
South Wales	156,259	11,932	44,731	29
Total	5,075,343	10,007	1,479,490	29

[1] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[2] Excluding criminal damage £20 and under.
[3] The City of London rate per 100,000 population figure is affected by the low resident population.

1992

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1992	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1992	Percentage cleared up
Avon and Somerset	173,068	12,214	28,806	17
Bedfordshire	59,008	11,019	11,677	20
Cambridgeshire	65,406	9,843	17,498	27
Cheshire	76,183	7,944	21,899	29
Cleveland	80,111	14,510	25,245	32
Cumbria	43,007	8,739	15,749	37
Derbyshire	83,439	8,943	18,612	22
Devon and Cornwall	113,413	7,571	20,085	18
Dorset	51,767	7,864	16,512	32
Durham	62,107	10,362	18,761	30
Essex	112,883	7,703	32,409	29
Gloucestershire	60,102	11,310	14,275	24
Greater Manchester	366,538	14,149	129,338	35
Hampshire	149,806	8,934	39,154	26
Hertfordshire	58,289	6,916	14,904	26
Humberside	126,110	14,678	28,960	23
Kent	155,176	10,172	41,962	27
Lancashire	115,741	8,295	42,459	37
Leicestershire	96,419	10,741	28,631	30
Lincolnshire	47,956	8,110	18,514	39
City of London	6,755	[3]171,056	1,343	20
Merseyside	144,087	9,980	60,825	42

Police force areas	Offences recorded[1] 1992	Offences per 100,000 population	Offences cleared up[2] 1992	Percentage cleared up
Metropolitan Police District	890,847	12,270	142,746	16
Norfolk	66,638	8,877	22,519	34
Northamptonshire	58,871	10,148	17,797	30
Northumbria	203,836	14,236	34,797	17
North Yorkshire	52,869	7,278	17,247	33
Nottinghamshire	159,807	15,720	41,312	26
South Yorkshire	132,699	10,237	34,981	26
Staffordshire	96,988	9,319	29,445	30
Suffolk	43,846	6,811	17,086	39
Surrey	52,866	7,076	11,596	22
Sussex	117,778	8,311	26,935	23
Thames Valley	196,074	9,885	38,199	19
Warwickshire	44,630	9,247	10,451	23
West Mercia	77,489	7,166	26,345	34
West Midlands	321,407	12,293	85,305	27
West Yorkshire	300,738	14,528	75,243	25
Wiltshire	41,104	7,315	15,231	37
Dyfed-Powys	26,554	5,632	13,986	53
Gwent	39,994	8,937	17,677	44
North Wales	47,811	7,323	15,949	33
South Wales	163,270	12,467	48,399	30
Total	5,383,487	10,614	1,390,864	26

[1] Excluding criminal damage 20 and under.
[2] Excluding criminal damage 20 and under.
[3] The City of London rate per 100,000 population figure is affected by the low resident population.

Racist Organisations

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many proceedings have been taken against racist organisations or their members in each of the last six years.

Mr. Jack: Information recorded centrally only identifies the defendant by gender and "other"—public bodies, organisations, etcetera. The table shows the number of prosecutions under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936 and part III of the Public Order Act 1986.

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' court under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936 and part III of the Public Order Act 1986[1], 1986-91
England and Wales

Year	Prosecutions	
	Persons	Other
1986	4	—
1987	11	—
1988	22	—
1989	28	—
1990	45	—
1991	65	—

[1] Came into force on 1 January 1987.

Passports

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each passport issuing office the current waiting times for processing applications for passports.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have asked the chief executive of the Passport Agency to reply and he will do so shortly. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Letter from J. E. Hayzelden to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me, as chief executive of the Passport Agency, to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about processing times for passport applications. I have set out below the current processing times for straightforward, properly completed passport applications at each of our six offices. They are:

Passport Office	Working days
Belfast	6
Glasgow	8
Liverpool	13
London	8
Newport	10
Peterborough	7

Our current target is to process these applications within a maximum of 20 working days, while processing urgent applications in accordance with customers' travel needs.

Knife Attacks

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many black youths and how many white youths died after a knife or other attack during the last five years in *(a)* south-east London, *(b)* the Metropolitan police district and *(c)* England, identifying where known if the killer or suspected assailant was (i) white and (ii) black.

Mr. Jack: This information is not available from the statistics collected centrally.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were brought by the police relating to animal welfare in 1991; and how many were successful.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The information is given in the table:

Number of prosecution brought by the police for offences relating to animal welfare by result, 1991
England and Wales

Offence	Police prosecutions	Convictions
Cruelty to animals	437	326
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, Sec. 22(3) 23 and 25(3)	1	1
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	337	254
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 8	—	—
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	—	—
Protection of Animals (Cruelty to dogs) Act, 1933	10	7
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	1	1
Pet Animals Act, 1951	2	—
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	10	5
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs. 40-42, 46, 49 and Orders under Secs. 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	24	19
Slaughterhouses Act 1974	—	—
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec. 1	19	16
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	4	3
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	—	—

Offence	Police prosecutions	Convictions
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1968, Secs. 1, 2 and 6	1	1
Badgers Act, 1973	19	12
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, Sec. 9	2	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, Sec. 11	4	4
Other	3	3
Diseases of Animals Act	47	31
Wild Birds Protection Acts	76	63

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hospital Beds

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* national health service hospital beds and *(b)* national health service private beds there were in each board area in each year since 1979.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* Information detailing the number of available beds in each health and social services board since 1979 is shown in the table. Information on the number of health service private beds is not collected centrally.

	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western
1979	8,728	2,454	2,662	3,280
1980	8,769	2,473	2,607	3,212
1981	8,801	2,485	2,597	3,140
1982	8,759	2,471	2,599	3,132
1983	8,751	2,519	2,606	3,100
1984	8,583	2,477	2,606	3,049
1985	8,441	2,508	2,608	3,038
1986	7,996	2,457	2,556	2,953
1987	7,728	2,373	2,432	2,877
1988-89	7,326	2,279	2,366	2,715
1989-90	7,058	2,149	2,294	2,653
1990-91	6,669	2,086	2,188	2,545
1991-92	6,207	1,984	2,095	2,314

Over the same period, the number of patients treated has increased from: 241,264 in 1979 to 278,960 in 1991-92.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Executive Agencies

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what key targets have been set for his executive agencies for the current year.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am responsible for six executive agencies; Chessington Computer Centre, Central Office of Information, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Civil Service College, Civil Service Occupational Health Service and Recruitment and Assessment Services. I announced Chessington's targets for the current year when it was launched on 1 April 1993. For the others, I have set the following key targets for each agency for the current year.

Central Office of Information (1993-94)

(i) To achieve break-even in current cost terms after covering all costs;

(ii) To achieve a 1 per cent. reduction in unit cost of output in real terms while maintaining suitable levels of quality;

(iii) To deliver all work in accordance with client specification;

(iv) To deliver all work on time.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1993)

(i) To achieve a current cost operating profit of £8·0 million, before exceptional items.

(ii) For print procurement, to achieve 95 per cent. overall of orders delivered to time and 100 per cent. of vital orders on time. Also 100 per cent. of orders delivered without fault;

(iii) For publications, to achieve 95 per cent. overall of production jobs delivered to time and 100 per cent. of basic production jobs on time. Also 100 per cent. of production jobs delivered without fault; in addition, to dispatch 85 per cent. of publications orders within four working days of receipt and 95 per cent. within five working days;

(iv) For business supplies, to dispatch 99 per cent. of orders of stock catalogue items within four working days of receipt. For non-stock items to place 95 per cent. of orders with contractors within five working days of receipt by HMSO.

Civil Service College (1993-94)

(i) To break even in accrual accounting terms, taking into account the central payment from OPSS;

(ii) To earn £300,000 from consultancy work;

(iii) To attract 7,200 students at grade 7 or above and 2,400 students below grade 7 who are in development schemes;

(iv) To attract 2,120 students on courses for externally validated qualifications;

(v) To earn 80 per cent. of course evaluations in the two highest categories;

(vi) There is also a medium term objective of obtaining a 10 per cent. increase in efficiency over the period 1991-92 to 1995-96.

Civil Service Occupational Health Service (1993-94)

(i) To break even in accrual accounting terms;

(ii) To achieve a cost per productive professional day (including administrative and overhead costs) of £268 or less;

(iii) To achieve an average cost per case referral of £23·50 or less;

(iv) To turn round within 15 days, 90 per cent. of referrals where no additional information is sought and within 40 days 65 per cent. of case referrals where additional information is sought;

(v) To earn 85 per cent. of customer satisfaction marking in the top two boxes of the post-service questionnaire.

Recruitment and Assessment Services (1993-94)

(i) To keep any operating deficit on an accruals basis to £450,000 or less;

(ii) To achieve volumes of 475 consultancy days sold and 25 training courses organised;

(iii) To increase efficiency by 2·5 per cent. over 1992-93 outturn;

(iv) To improve the quality of service to customers and achieve 95 per cent. responses in the top three categories of the customer satisfaction questionnaires and, within this target, to achieve 75 per cent. of responses in the top two categories.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of British domestic tourists in each year used *(a)* hotels/guest houses/bed and breakfast, *(b)* self-catering, *(c)* holiday camp and *(d)* other accommodation.

Mr. Key: The available information is contained in the following table:

Domestic tourists in the United Kingdom: Percentage figures for type of accommodation used are shown below:

Type of accommodation used	*1989*[2] *per cent*	*1990*[2] *per cent*	*1991*[2] *per cent*
Hotels/motel/guest houses/ farmhouse/other private house/bed and breakfast[1]	27	27	24
Self-catering accommodation[3]	18	19	21
Holiday camp/village[1]	3	3	3
Other accommodation[4]	58	55	56

Source: United Kingdom Tourism Survey.

[1] The categories of accommodation listed in the table above are the ones employed by the United Kingdom Tourism Survey and in some instances are slightly different from those specified in the question.

[2] Each year's percentages sum to more than 100 per cent. for two reasons. Firstly, part of the "holiday camp/village" category is also included in the "self-catering accommodation" category. Secondly, on some trips tourists use more than one type of accommodation.

[3] Non-commercial accommodation is not included in the category "self-catering accommodation".

[4] Other accommodation includes staying with friends and relatives.

ENVIRONMENT

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his deregulatory review of existing controls on toxic and hazardous waste; and which bodies he is consulting as part of the review.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are considering regulations which will implement directive 91/689/EEC on hazardous waste and which will replace the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980. This will take account of deregulation, any views of the industry task forces and the need to avoid unnecessary controls.

The directive requires agreement on a list of hazardous waste. Successive drafts of the list prepared by the European Commission have been circulated for comment to a wide range of representative bodies. Consultation on revisions to the regulations is planned for later in the year.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue discussion documents on the lines of his Department's publication "Climate Change: our National Programme for Carbon Dioxide Emissions" in relation to other greenhouse gases.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the increase in carbon emissions for every 1 per cent. decrease in the real cost of *(a)* gas and *(b)* electricity.

Mr. Maclean: Decreases in the real cost of energy will tend to increase demand and hence lead to increased carbon emissions. It is difficult to give a rule of thumb estimate of the effect, since the price elasticity of demand varies significantly between sectors and depends both on the absolute level of prices and the magnitude of any change. Changes in the price of any one fuel may also affect demand for others. And the impact on carbon emissions of a change in demand for electricity will depend on how the change in demand affects the balance of fuels used in generation.

As an illustration of the possible impact of energy price changes, the 17.5 per cent. increase in the price of energy to domestic sector users implied by the introduction of VAT is estimated to lead to a decrease in carbon emissions of approximately 1.5 million tonnes by the year 2000. An equivalent fall in energy prices to the domestic sector would have an approximately opposite effect.

Landfill Levy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce a landfill levy.

Mr. Maclean: We are currently considering the responses to the report by Coopers and Lybrand into "Landfill Costs and Prices: Correcting Possible Market Distortions", published in February 1993. To assist with this, we have also commissioned a study assessing the environmental impact of landfill against other waste management options and I expect this to be completed shortly.

Environment Conference, Lucerne

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on matters discussed and decisions taken at the second pan-European conference of Environment Ministers in Lucerne on 28 to 30 April; and what additional financial pledges were made by the United Kingdom to support decisions taken.

Mr. Maclean: The main subject discussed at the "Environment for Europe" conference in Lucerne from 28 to 30 April was the environmental action programme for central and eastern Europe. This sets out a broad strategy for tackling the most immediate environmental problems in central and eastern Europe, based on a "three-legged" approach of policy reform, institutional strengthening and investments. The conference firmly supported the implementation of this strategy. It also endorsed the establishment of mechanisms to implement the EAP, including a framework to facilitate the project preparation and investment process, and a task force to co-ordinate efforts to support institutional and policy change.

There was a progress report on the state of the environment in Europe report, which will serve as the basis of the further development of an environmental programme for Europe. The possible use of economic instruments was discussed, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was asked to explore further ways to facilitate a wider use of such instruments.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave the keynote address in the debate on monitoring, compliance and enforcement in environmental policy. Decisions in this area called for the extension of the OECD environmental performance reviews to Poland, Bulgaria and Belarus, for the work on integrated pollution prevention and control to be taken forward and for the elaboration of proposals to encourage public participation in environmental decision making.

It was agreed that the next conference should take place at the invitation of the Government of Bulgaria in 1995.

The follow-up work to the Lucerne conference and the preparation of the next conference will be co-ordinated within the UNECE framework.

This was not a pledging conference.

UN Commission on Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals the United Kingdom intends to put forward to the first meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in New York in June.

Mr. Maclean: Our aim is to ensure that the commission plays an effective role in promoting sustainable development throughout the world following the Earth summit in Rio. I have placed the text of a joint Indo-British action plan for the first meeting of the commission in the Library of the House.

THORP

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set out the terms of the BNFL licence application for the thermel oxide reprocessing plant; what specific substances, types and volumes of waste are proposed to be discharged, giving the respective levels and life of radioactivity; and how the different waste products will be dealt with;

(2) how the THORP licence, which has been applied for, differs from the existing licence in terms of the discharges it allows.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested by the hon. Member is contained in the public consultation documents issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 16 November last year, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Dail Eireann

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the meeting of 25 February in Dublin of an all-party group from Dail Eireann with officials from his Department.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 March 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

I understand that the meeting on 25 February was between an all-party group of Members of the Dail Eireann and senior executives from British Nuclear Fuels plc who had been invited to answer questions on the company's activities.

WALES

TECs

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *187*, if he will now give the budgets for each training and enterprise council in Wales and the amounts in each case for *(a)* youth training and *(b)* adult training for 1993-94; and what is the change in cash and percentage terms: from the budgets for 1992-93.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office is currently finalising contracts with TECs for 1993-94 budgets and the information is not yet available.

National House Building Council

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how often decisions made by the NHBC were re-examined by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The NHBC has been approved as an approved inspector only since 11 November 1985. Under sections 16(10) and 39 of the Building Act 1984 my right hon. Friend deals with determinations and appeals, but has no powers to intervene in individual cases dealt with by the NHBC acting in its capacity as an approved inspector. An approved inspector must carry out its duties in accordance with the Building (Approved Inspector etc.) Regulations 1985.

Skin Diseases

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on his policy on skin diseases;

(2) what measures he will take to improve awareness of the problems encountered by persons with skin disease;

(3) if he will meet the National Eczema Society;

(4) what is the annual amount of financial aid he gives to organisations in Wales devoted to assisting those who suffer skin diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Treatment of skin diseases is a matter for practitioners and for health authorities within their obligations to maximise health gain. The subject of skin diseases will be included in further advice to guide local strategies for health, to be published shortly.

No direct grants are currently made to voluntary organisations specifically concerned with skin diseases. I am always prepared to consider requests for meetings from organisations such as the National Eczema Society.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultant dermatologists there are in each health district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The requested information is given in the following table:

	Consultant Dermatologists in Posts[1]
Clwyd	1·8
East Dyfed	1·8
Gwent	2·0
Gwynedd	1·1
Mid Glamorgan	2·0
Pembrokeshire	0·2
Powys	0·1
South Glamorgan	3·0
West Glamorgan	1·8

[1] Whole-time equivalents of consultants in post as at 30 September 1991.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of referrals for new hospital out-patients in 1991-92 which related to skin diseases.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information relates to referrals for new hospital out-patients in the specialty of dermatology. There were 29,522 such referrals in 1991-92, which represented 5·3 per cent. of all referrals.

Hearing Aid Clinics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hearing aid clinics there are in each county in Wales; if he will list their locations; where residents in Clwyd travel to obtain advice and assistance concerning hearing aids and hearing difficulties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the numbers and location of hearing aid clinics is not available centrally. The level of provision and location of clinics is a matter for the local health authority.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to establish a clinic for the giving of advice concerning hearing aids on Deeside, Clwyd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the local health authority to consider.

European Farm Commissioners

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department was represented at the European Farm Commissioners meeting on 26 and 27 April.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Suicides

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many suicides on farms have occurred in Wales in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the suicide rate amongst the working population in Wales by occupation in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

IACS Forms

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received advocating an extension of the deadline for submitting completed integrated administration and control system forms.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will require local authorities in Wales to make maps available to farmers to assist in the completion of the integrated administration and control system forms before 15 May.

Mr. David Hunt: The ability which local authorities have to allow farmers access to maps is constrained by the facilities they have for public viewing and the terms of any copyright agreement related to the maps in their possession. Given the urgent need which farmers have to obtain the information required to complete their integrated administration and control system forms, I have agreed with the Ordnance Survey that local authorities and other organisations which hold maps may be allowed to make them available for viewing and, provided that they adopt the appropriate commercial arrangements pertaining to copyright agreements, for sale also. Many organisations, including local authorities, have responded positively to a request to offer this facility to farmers.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department made to the European Commission concerning the deadline set for the submission of completed integrated administration and control system forms.

Mr. David Hunt: The deadline for the submission of applications has been set at 15 May in the governing EC regulation to allow sufficient time for field inspections to be undertaken to verify claims under the new arable aid and beef support regimes. At the Agriculture Council last week the Commission confirmed that the deadline cannot be extended.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Investment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals in regard to investment in the coal industry were put forward by the United Kingdom at the European Industry Council of Ministers meeting on the European Coal and Steel Community meeting in Brussels on 4 May.

Mr. Eggar: No specific coal investment proposals were discussed at the European Industry Council of Ministers on 4 May.

Misleading Pricing

Mr. Moss: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he has made to the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee on Misleading Price Indications; and if he will publish their report.

Mr. Leigh: My noble Friend the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms has considered the committee's recommendations. She has decided to continue to rely on the existing general provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 rather than introduce a package of regulations dealing with various types of price comparison as the committee recommended. She intends in due course to consult on proposed revisions to the code of practice for traders on price indications. She expects to go to public consultation in the near future on regulations on price indications when tickets for theatres and other public events are resold by agents. Since the committee has discharged its remit, she has decided to stand it down.

A copy of the committee's report will be placed in the Library.

UKCS

Mr. John Butterfill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the total exploration and appraisal expenditure on the United Kingdom continental shelf over the last three years was spent on *(a)* wells, *(b)* seismic, *(c)* overheads, *(d)* insurance and *(e)* other expenditure.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The Department of Trade and Industry collects only aggregate

data on UKCS exploration and appraisal expenditure. These were published, in April 1993, in appendix 12 of my Department's report to Parliament, the "Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom", the Brown Book, a copy of which is available in the Library. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of such expenditure into the categories requested using available data sources.

Chernobyl

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest information Her Majesty's Government have received from the Ukrainian, Russian and Belarus authorities in regard to the number of people who died as a result of the Chernobyl accident in April 1986.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have received no information directly on this subject. The Department is aware of a scientific article by Ilyin et al entitled "Radiocontamination patterns and possible health consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station" published in the *Journal of Radiological Protection 1990*, Vol 10 No. 1, pp 3-29. In addition, a report published in 1990 by an international advisory committee, co-ordinated by the International Atomic Energy Agency, entitled "The international Chernobyl project: an overview", looked at the consequences of the accident. Copies of it are available in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Chiropody

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many chiropodists counted as full-time equivalent are employed by each health board; and how many are employed per 1,000 population.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is shown in the table. Due to the small number of staff employed, rates are shown per 100,000 population.

Health board chiropodists as at September 1992

	Whole-time equivalent	*Rate per 100,000 population*
Scotland	536·3	10·6
Argyll and Clyde	46·3	10·6
Ayrshire and Arran	59·6	16·0
Borders	13·7	13·2
Dumfries and Galloway	15·3	10·4
Fife	48·8	14·1
Forth Valley	26·8	9·9
Grampian	41·6	8·2
Greater Glasgow	89·3	9·8
Highland	17·0	8·3
Lanarkshire	52·7	9·5
Lothian	76·6	10·3
Orkney	1·0	5·1
Shetland	4·0	18·0
Tayside	40·2	10·3
Western Isles	3·4	11·3
State Hospital	0·1	—

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current waiting time in each health board area for an appointment with a chiropodist.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not collected centrally.

Health Boards (Public Relations)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many senior posts in public relations existed in each health board immediately before any unit acquired trust status; and how many such posts exist in health trusts currently.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is not available centrally.

Arachnoiditis

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is available within the national health service for sufferers from arachnoiditis.

Mr. Stewart: It is for health boards to negotiate contracts for the provision of services for arachnoiditis patients based on their assessment of need.

Child Psychotherapists

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase the number of child psychotherapists to work with vulnerable children and their families.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Psychotherapy represents one approach to treating vulnerable children and their families. It is for health boards and other statutory agencies to decide the number of child psychotherapists required to meet identified needs in their areas.

HEALTH

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the City of London police about the need for an accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a letter from the Acting Assistant Commissioner of the City of London police. The letter has been passed on to the North East Thames regional health authority, which has responsibility for the consultations on the future of St. Bartholomew's accident and emergency department.

G. P. Fund Holders

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the guidelines issued to general practitioner fund holders on managing their budgets efficiently.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) on 14 April at column *608*.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the cost effectiveness of general practitioner fund holding.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) on 4 May at column *43*.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives of the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss the provision of personal social services during the current financial year.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) on 4 May at column *40*.

Anophthalmic Children

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 February to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), *Official Report*, columns *478-79*, when she expects the Moorfields study of children born anophthalmic or with very small eyes to be completed.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the study is due to be completed later this summer.

Homeopathy

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with the Royal College of Physicians regarding the status of homoeopathy.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is Her Majesty's Government's national strategy for the prevention of volatile substance and solvent abuse for 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government's strategy against drug misuse was set out in "Tackling Drug Misuse: A Summary of the Government's Strategy" and "UK Action on Drug Misuse—The Government's Strategy", copies of which are available in the Library. The Government will continue to take action to prevent volatile substance abuse in the context of that overall strategy. The prevention working group of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is currently examining issues relating to volatile substance abuse and will make recommendations to Ministers in due course.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is Her Majesty's Government's financial commitment to volatile substance and solvent abuse prevention in 1993-94; and how much of this figure is represented by payments to voluntary organisations.

Dr. Mawhinney: Action to prevent volatile substance abuse is one element of a number of central Department programmes, including programmes of support for voluntary organisations. Expenditure on the volatile substance abuse prevention elements of these programmes cannot be separately identified. The national curriculum requires all maintained schools in England and Wales to provide some education about the misuse of drugs and other substances. Health and local authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their resident population and for providing services to meet those needs, including services for the prevention of volatile substance abuse.

Natural Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to invite voluntary groups representing natural medicine to join the Wider Health Working Group.

Mr. Sackville: Because of the very wide range of organisations and interests concerned with health, it is not possible for membership of the wider health working group to reflect every aspect. The group is always ready to take into account issues raised by those who are not directly represented.

Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued on the use of agency arrangements by district health authorities where they are unable to provide 75 per cent. of all local abortions.

Mr. Sackville: None. It is the responsibility of individual health authorities to decide how best to provide local health services.

Merged Health Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have merged into larger units over the last five years; and if he will state for each merger the population of each merging authority and the population of the new unit, the number of public health doctors in each merging authority and the number of public health doctors in each new unit.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown arranged by region. Figures for population and numbers of public health doctors are bracketed in that order after each authority.

Figures for populations are the 1991 census-based provisional mid-1991 resident population estimates, except those districts marked [1] for which information was not collected in the 1991 estimates. In these cases, figures are based on the 1981 census-based mid-1990 resident population estimates.

Information on public health doctors refers to substantive appointments of directors of public health and consultants in public health medicine and is taken from the 30 September 1991 census. Figures are not yet available for the new authorities, except in the case of Bloomsbury and Islington.

Northern Region

Durham (238,137) [0]/N.W. Durham (87,022) [0]—North Durham (325,159)

Darlington (124,390) [1]/S.W. Durham (154,800) [2]—South Durham (279,190)

Yorkshire Region

Leeds Eastern(['346,944)[0]/Leeds Western ('365,260)[0]—Leeds (706,299)

Northallerton (115,216)[2]/Scarborough (150,589)[1]/York (270,199)[0]/Harrogate (134,131)[2]/Airedale (part) (50,743) [2 for whole authority]—North Yorkshire (720,878)

Bradford (337,782)[5]/Airedale (part) (130,920) [2 for whole authority]—Bradford (468,702)

Hull (314,268)[1]/East Yorkshire (198,946)[2]—East Riding (513,214)

Scunthorpe (199,613)[1]/Grimsby (161,589)[1]—Grimsby and Scunthorpe (361,202)

Calderdale (194,138)[2]/Huddersfield (213,449)[3]/Dewsbury (167,726)[3]—West Yorkshire (575,313)

Wakefield (144,181)[2]/Pontefract (171,662)[3]—Wakefield (315,843)

Trent Region

Central Nottingham (289,126)[5]/Bassetlaw (105,259)[0]—North Nottinghamshire (394,385)

East Anglian Region

Peterborough (212,892)[1]/West Norfolk and Wisbech (190,610)[2]—North West Anglia (403,502)

West Suffolk (174,119)[4]/East Suffolk (334,071)[2]—Suffolk (508,190)

North East Thames Region

Bloomsbury ('127,674)[3]/Islington ('173,630)[1]—Bloomsbury and Islington (242,437—small part of Bloomsbury also transferred to Parkside DHA in 1990)[2]

North East Essex (306,345)[2]/Mid Essex (294,673)[1]/West Essex (258,891)[2]—North Essex (859,909)

Bloomsbury and Islington (242,437)[2]/Hampstead (105,013)[4]—Camden and Islington (347,450)

Southend (325,978)[1]/Basildon and Thurrock (291,955)[0]/Barking, Havering and Brentwood (part) (70,929)[0]—South Essex (688,862)

(NB this leaves a "rump" of the old Barking, Havering and Brentwood, which becomes Barking and Havering DHA (376,452))

Tower Hamlets (165,049)[1]/City and Hackney (187,674)[2]/Newham (217,010)[2]—East London and the City (569,733)

Enfield (261,518)[1]/Haringey (206,769)[1]—New River (468,287)

Redbridge (229,813)[1]/Waltham Forest (216,181) [1]—Redbridge and Waltham Forest (445,994)

North West Thames Region

East Hertfordshire (295,261)[1]/North Hertfordshire (188,398)[0]—East and North Hertfordshire (483,659)

Harrow (202,924)[2]/Parkside (part) (247,205) [6 for whole authority]—Brent & Harrow (450,129)

Riverside (part) (138,459)[0]/Parkside (part) (185,366) [6 for whole authority]—Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster (323,825)

Ealing (280,031)[2]/Riverside (part) (152,048)[0]/Hounslow and Spelthorne (part) (207,714) [2 for whole authority] —Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow (639,793)

South East Thames region

Lewisham and North Southwark (327,888) [0]/Camberwell (218,102) [0]/West Lambeth (161,816) [1]—South East London (707,806)

Brighton (310,894) [3]/Eastbourne (236,898) [2]/Hastings (168,690) [0]—East Sussex (716,482)

South West Thames region

North West Surrey (214,586) [1]/West Surrey and North East Hampshire (part) (81,294) [2 for whole authority]/Hounslow and Spelthorne (North West Thames Region) (part) (91,372) [2 for whole authority]—North West Surrey (expanded) (387,252)

South West Surrey (188,171) [0]/West Surrey and North East Hampshire (part) (54,787) [2 for whole authority]—South West Surrey (expanded) (242,958)

Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton (231,115) [3]/Kingston and Esher (183,376) [0]—Kingston and Richmond (414,491)

Wessex region

East Dorset (458,522) [3]/West Dorset (204,340) [0]—Dorset (662,862)

Oxford region

Aylesbury Vale (148,099) [2]/Wycombe (278,386) [0]/Milton Keynes (178,889) [4]—Buckinghamshire (605,374)

South Western region

Bristol and Weston (368,795 [7]/Frenchay (223,819 [0]/Southmead (237,634) [0]—Bristol and District (830,248)

Gloucester (319,436 [1]/Cheltenham and District (218,825) [2] —Gloucestershire (538,261)

Exeter (318,138) [2]/North Devon (138,910) [1]—Exeter and North Devon (457,048)

Torbay (248,414) [2]/Plymouth (334,559) [1]—Torbay and Plymouth (582,973)

West Midlands region

Rugby ('85,883) [0]/North Warwickshire ('176,156) [0]—North East Warwickshire (265,467)

Central Birmingham ('180,199) [0]/South Birmingham ('246,435) [4]—South Birmingham (424,797)

Bromsgrove and Redditch (171,216) [2]/Kidderminster (104,033) [2]—North Worcestershire (275,249)

North East Warwickshire (265,467) [2]/South Warwickshire (224,457) [1]—Warwickshire (489,924)

Mersey region

None.

North Western region

None.

Dentistry

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists who have not given notice to leave the dental list have given written notice to each FHSA to deregister some or all of their continuing care arrangements for adult patients in each week since 20 November 1992; how many dentists have deregistered patients; and how many patients have been deregistered.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information requested is given in the table. The information provided weekly by family health services authorities since July 1992 shows that in the period up to 23 April 1993, 1,842 dentists have given notification to deregister 437,352 adult patients.

In the period 1 July 1992 to 28 February 1993, the total number of adult patients registered with a dentist in England has increased by 0·648 million, 3·1 per cent. from 20·580 million to 21·228 million. This increase has occurred over a period during which dentists have deregistered 0·4 million patients and where over 2·4 million registrations have lapsed because the patient has not visited the dentist in the last two years.

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Cleveland	2	0	1	0
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	3	3	5	3
Humberside	0	0	1	0
North Yorkshire	4	13	6	3
Calderdale	2	1	0	1
Kirklees	0	2	1	1
Leeds	10	15	15	0
Leicestershire	0	1	0	0
Nottinghamshire	5	3	6	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	1	0	1	0
Norfolk	0	1	0	0
Suffolk	2	1	1	2
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	5
Essex	2	1	5	10
City and East London	1	1	3	1
Enfield and Haringey	1	0	0	1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	2	0	0	0
Kent	7	8	4	2
Greenwich and Bexley	0	2	2	0
Bromley	0	1	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3	0	2	2
Surrey	1	1	1	1
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	5	0	2	2
Dorset	0	0	0	0

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Cleveland	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	1	0
Gateshead	0	1	0	0
Humberside	1	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	5	1	2	1
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	1	0	0	1
Leeds	4	0	11	0
Leicestershire	0	0	3	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	1	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	3	1	1	1
Suffolk	1	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	1	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Essex	1	0	0	0
City and East London	1	0	1	1
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	4	3	0	4
Greenwich and Bexley	2	1	2	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1	9	0	0
Surrey	1	2	0	0
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	0
Dorset	2	2	1	0

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Cleveland	1	0	0	0
Durham	2	1	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	1	0	1	2
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	1	0	1
Leeds	2	3	2	0
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	1	0	0	0
Doncaster	1	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	1	0	1	0
Suffolk	0	1	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	3	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	2
City and East London	1	0	1	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	0
Kent	3	2	5	0
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	0
Bromley	1	0	1	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	6	0	4
Surrey	0	0	0	1
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	1	2
Dorset	1	0	0	0

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Cleveland	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	1
North Yorkshire	0	1	0	0
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	1	0
Leeds	0	1	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	2	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	1	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	1	1	0
City and East London	0	0	0	2
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0	0	0	1
Kent	5	2	1	3
Greenwich and Bexley	3	0	0	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3	0	1	0
Surrey	0	0	0	0
Croydon	0	1	1	1
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	2	0	0	0
Dorset	2	0	0	0

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Cleveland	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0
Humberside	1	1	1	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	0	1	2	1
Kirklees	0	0	0	0
Leeds	0	0	1	1
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	1	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Barnet	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	0
Essex	1	0	0	0
City and East London	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	1	1	0	0
Kent	0	3	0	1
Greenwich and Bexley	0	0	0	0
Bromley	0	1	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	1	0
Surrey	0	1	0	0
Croydon	2	2	0	1
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	1	0	1
Dorset	0	0	0	0

Number of dentists deregistering child patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Hampshire	1	1	3	1
Wiltshire	2	3	0	1
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Berkshire	1	0	1	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	1	0	0
Avon	3	0	1	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2	1	1	0
Devon	4	3	4	2
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	1
Liverpool	0	5	2	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	0	0
Wirral	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	2	0	0	2
Bolton	3	1	0	4
Bury	0	0	3	0
Stockport	2	0	0	0
Tameside	0	1	1	1
Trafford	3	1	0	2
Total	75	71	72	50

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Hampshire	2	1	2	1
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0	2	0
Berkshire	1	1	1	2
Buckinghamshire	1	0	0	5
Oxfordshire	0	0	1	0
Avon	1	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	1	1	0
Devon	3	1	0	1
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	1	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	1	0	3	1
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Wirral	0	0	2	0
Lancashire	2	1	0	2
Bolton	0	0	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	1	0	0	1
	40	25	36	21

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Hampshire	2	2	2	1
Wiltshire	0	0	2	1
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Berkshire	1	1	1	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	1	0

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Oxfordshire	1	0	5	8
Avon	0	2	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Devon	1	1	2	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	2	0	0
Solihull	2	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	4	2	1	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Wirral	0	1	0	1
Lancashire	2	3	0	1
Bolton	0	0	0	1
Bury	1	1	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	1	0	0	0
Total	30	29	29	28

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Hampshire	0	0	2	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	2	0	0	0
Berkshire	2	2	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	2	0	0	0
Avon	0	1	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1	0	1	0
Devon	0	0	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	1	0	1
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	9	0	0
Solihull	0	0	2	1
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	3	3	3	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Wirral	0	1	0	0
Lancashire	1	1	0	1
Bolton	0	1	1	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Total	26	25	17	13

Number of dentists deregistering adult patients
Week ending 27 November 1992 to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Hampshire	1	0	2	1
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Berkshire	0	0	0	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0
Avon	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1	0	0	0
Devon	0	0	0	2
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	2	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	1	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	1	0
Wirral	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	4	2	2
Bolton	1	1	0	0
Bury	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Total	9	18	12	13

Notes:

1. Dentists who first deregistered patients between week ending 3 July 1992 and week ending 20 November 1992 are not included in this table, even if they deregistered patients between 21 November 1992 and 23 April 1993 since each dentist is only counted once on the first occasion he deregistered a patient.
2. In the 32 FHSAs not included in this table, no dentist first deregistered a patient between 21 November 1992 and 23 April 1993.
3. A small number of FHSAs have submitted revised figures. These amendments have been included in the cumulative totals but not in the weekly totals. The sum of the weekly totals does not therefore equal the cumulative total.

Number of adult patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Cleveland	8	0	43	0
Cumbria	151	520	7	327
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	48	51	0	62
Gateshead	29	34	21	23
Humberside	0	144	126	64
North Yorkshire	66	277	12	7
Calderdale	10	1	0	1
Kirklees	0	4	3	1
Leeds	31	236	117	122
Derbyshire	482	762	416	527
Leicestershire	132	120	360	292
Nottinghamshire	7	87	18	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	8	0	0	2
Cambridgeshire	160	66	150	83
Norfolk	392	558	951	207
Suffolk	18	46	12	51
Hertfordshire	269	67	79	75
Barnet	1	3	0	4
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	0	0	200
Essex	79	8	41	213
Barking and Havering	0	0	142	0
Camden and Islington	0	30	0	0
City and East London	2	2	7	2
Enfield and Haringey	155	0	0	100
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	37	80	13	44
East Sussex	95	108	67	133
Kent	2,415	3,647	1,451	1,325
Greenwich and Bexley	125	93	55	61
Bromley	360	53	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	8	0	11	3
Surrey	391	547	957	288
West Sussex	0	0	0	0
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	24	15
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	7	0	104	244
Dorset	481	498	290	303
Hampshire	228	291	271	81
Wiltshire	672	382	67	858
Isle of Wight	72	4	37	22
Berkshire	142	185	124	60
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	260	278	312	391
Avon	96	41	586	65
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	210	194	101	78
Devon	300	424	2,066	122
Gloucestershire	1,086	982	698	1,428
Hereford and Worcester	61	35	82	75
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	7	93	4	14
Warwickshire	0	0	0	2,324
Birmingham	9	5	5	3
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	54	21	26	5

FHSA	27 November	4 December	11 December	18 December
Liverpool	0	8	3	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	0	0
Sefton	0	4	0	0
Wirral	7	3	3	0
Lancashire	458	141	367	463
Bolton	136	1	0	8
Bury	0	0	10	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0
Stockport	386	272	0	99
Tameside	0	62	57	50
Trafford	5	1	0	2
	10,137	11,469	10,296	10,937

Number of adult patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	8 January	15 January	22 January	29 January
Cleveland	71	0	0	34
Cumbria	185	220	174	200
Durham	0	18	0	31
Northumberland	77	12	8	32
Gateshead	43	29	22	22
Humberside	249	123	197	52
North Yorkshire	58	9	73	25
Calderdale	6	61	0	0
Kirklees	1	1	5	12
Leeds	337	135	42	30
Derbyshire	275	461	250	191
Leicestershire	320	160	220	325
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	1	1	1	0
Cambridgeshire	156	119	59	37
Norfolk	2,246	614	1,617	472
Suffolk	112	9	11	0
Hertfordshire	272	236	54	386
Barnet	2	2	28	32
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	27	0	0
Essex	55	266	40	60
Barking and Havering	30	0	0	45
Camden and Islington	29	0	0	0
City and East London	5	1	2	1
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	57	40	50	34
East Sussex	110	55	90	71
Kent	1,521	2,145	675	670
Greenwich and Bexley	180	30	63	31
Bromley	200	51	105	17
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1	18	0	0
Surrey	613	459	304	297
West Sussex	0	0	0	0
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	86	46	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	960	3	5	2
Dorset	608	929	481	231
Hampshire	310	76	344	338
Wiltshire	345	162	164	111
Isle of Wight	28	72	80	8
Berkshire	387	152	130	3,599
Buckinghamshire	300	0	0	8,000
Oxfordshire	504	523	507	431
Avon	346	76	105	122
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	148	3,105	14	189
Devon	517	158	356	248
Gloucestershire	2,267	859	2,303	687
Hereford and Worcester	133	39	93	87
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	56	0	0	59
Warwickshire	2,084	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	3	0	1
Coventry	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	416	6	237	41
Liverpool	2	0	5	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Sefton	0	4	0	0
Wirral	0	3	4	0
Lancashire	301	208	1,085	370
Bolton	3	4	3	1
Bury	0	0	0	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	98
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	3	0	0	1
	17,016	11,730	10,006	17,733

Number of adult patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 February	12 February	19 February	26 February
Cleveland	151	0	49	0
Cumbria	126	356	107	4
Durham	22	12	4	1
Northumberland	93	9	54	28
Gateshead	23	19	20	18
Humberside	95	108	113	22
North Yorkshire	8	17	267	423
Calderdale	11	5	49	9
Kirklees	0	9	1	4
Leeds	259	389	35	23
Derbyshire	272	361	560	494
Leicestershire	240	325	90	330
Nottinghamshire	105	0	0	0
Doncaster	1	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	1
Cambridgeshire	206	48	424	113
Norfolk	1,974	382	331	441
Suffolk	0	200	6	60
Hertfordshire	31	233	17	52
Barnet	72	0	96	23
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	200	20	35	0
Essex	173	128	65	247
Barking and Havering	0	25	0	0
Camden and Islington	0	0	0	0
City and East London	3	1	2	4
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	43	17	70	8
East Sussex	89	421	84	71
Kent	890	887	801	661
Greenwich and Bexley	39	43	29	28
Bromley	23	255	5	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	204	0	42
Surrey	580	287	350	260
West Sussex	0	0	0	0
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	13	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	4	1	6	5
Dorset	180	351	226	308
Hampshire	898	791	391	4
Wiltshire	170	43	201	223
Isle of Wight	68	67	0	17
Berkshire	556	867	159	160
Buckinghamshire	0	0	700	0
Oxfordshire	84	328	515	275
Avon	286	328	85	159
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	33	26	41	21
Devon	326	278	287	274
Gloucestershire	1,818	1,251	59	808
Hereford and Worcester	70	57	57	31
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	5	1	0	53
Warwickshire	0	1,849	0	0
Birmingham	0	4	0	3
Coventry	0	219	0	0
Solihul	2,489	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	69	41	58
Liverpool	8	3	3	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	1	18	0	2
Lancashire	145	679	293	298
Bolton	0	0	1	4
Bury	500	2	0	0
Manchester	0	140	0	0
Stockport	0	68	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	73
Trafford	1	4	4	3
	13,371	12,20[illegible]	6,746	6,148

Number of adult patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	5 March	12 March	19 March	26 March
Cleveland	60	112	6	12
Cumbria	47	513	689	302
Durham	4	0	0	0
Northumberland	42	36	40	0
Gateshead	0	38	26	4
Humberside	132	101	110	238
North Yorkshire	90	152	374	101
Calderdale	5	35	8	21
Kirklees	1	1	5	0
Leeds	223	100	42	24
Derbyshire	575	428	254	224
Leicestershire	240	120	73	102
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	110	52	34	45
Norfolk	369	153	668	434
Suffolk	45	36	6	0
Hertfordshire	127	73	44	23
Barnet	28	0	32	6
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	35	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0	86	182	0
Essex	39	26	65	0
Barking and Havering	0	700	600	143
Camden and Islington	0	22	0	0
City and East London	0	0	3	6
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	31	30	16	4
East Sussex	183	45	179	67
Kent	814	1,326	783	102
Greenwich and Bexley	154	12	2	25
Bromley	143	0	8	11
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	10	0	1	0
Surrey	95	229	311	206
West Sussex	130	730	167	152
Croydon	0	7	22	7
Kingston and Richmond	14	2	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	7	0	4	3
Dorset	813	822	458	246
Hampshire	416	461	347	54
Wiltshire	227	8	40	266
Isle of Wight	149	125	4	25
Berkshire	45	179	1,489	197
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	403	339	464	683
Avon	0	217	94	35
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	139	541	183	1,709
Devon	746	370	286	188
Gloucestershire	163	910	457	586
Hereford and Worcester	12	33	41	99
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	3	4	0	7
Warwickshire	0	0	0	2,059
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Coventry	0	118	0	0
Solihull	0	0	4	1
Cheshire	26	62	88	25
Liverpool	8	16	18	46
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Sefton	0	0	0	9
Wirral	0	22	20	15
Lancashire	607	192	396	256
Bolton	0	1	5	2
Bury	1	0	0	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	0	0	1	0
	7,476	9,585	9,184	8,770

Number of adult patients deregistered
Week ending 27 November to week ending 23 April 1993

FHSA	2 April	9 April	16 April	23 April
Cleveland	53	0	12	221
Cumbria	54	234	155	117
Durham	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	34	20	85	177
Gateshead	6	1	14	13
Humberside	389	245	384	150
North Yorkshire	15	88	70	7
Calderdale	8	10	3	12
Kirklees	0	1	74	46
Leeds	21	164	93	25
Derbyshire	597	271	128	256
Leicestershire	132	84	77	46
Nottinghamshire	0	0	258	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	71	71	12	104
Norfolk	350	361	213	728
Suffolk	0	723	68	0
Hertfordshire	66	12	39	26
Barnet	21	12	12	26
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	21
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	267	0	63	67
Essex	105	144	132	29
Barking and Havering	0	93	0	61
Camden and Islington	0	0	0	0
City and East London	0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	13	1	16	8
East Sussex	98	116	111	121
Kent	378	527	163	154
Greenwich and Bexley	0	38	27	0
Bromley	1	97	6	16
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	1	0
Surrey	126	141	469	381
West Sussex	83	67	33	15
Croydon	26	44	0	14
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1	4	2	1
Dorset	216	104	581	295
Hampshire	239	200	362	6
Wiltshire	233	56	33	153
Isle of Wight	225	174	8	0
Berkshire	48	124	96	1,617
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	240	190	274	359
Avon	442	12	76	36
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	54	22	27	472
Devon	222	225	271	1,581
Gloucestershire	210	276	531	360
Hereford and Worcester	37	21	17	11
Shropshire	0	55	0	0
Staffordshire	77	101	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	3	0
Coventry	82	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	32	27	3	6
Liverpool	4	0	3	1
St. Helens and Knowsley	1	0	3	0
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Wirral	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	229	617	60	356
Bolton	3	2	0	2
Bury	0	0	3	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Tameside	0	0	0	0
Trafford	3	0	0	2
	5,512	5,775	5,071	8,099

Note:

[1] No patients have been deregistered in the 21 remaining FHSAs during this period.

[2] A small number of FHSAs have submitted revised figures. These amendments have been included in the cumulative totals but not in the weekly totals. The sum of the weekly totals does not therefore equal the cumulative total.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), *Official Report*, columns *268-70*, if he will make a similar analysis for each quintile of pensioners' incomes for single pensioners, pensioner couples and all pensioner units.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the tables.

Table 1
The average incomes of pensioners 1979-1989 (by quintile—quintile 1 = lowest)
(a) Single pensioners

Average income (£ per week, 1989 prices)

Income source	*Quintile 1*		*Quintile 2*		*Quintile 3*		*Quintile 4*		*Quintile 5*		*Total*	
	1979	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*
Earnings*	0·30	0·10	0·10	0·30	0·30	0·20	3·10	1·90	20·80	18·10	4·90	4·10
Benefit income	42·20	46·50	49·10	54·90	51·50	62·40	51·10	59·40	46·30	52·00	48·00	55·00
Investment income	1·70	2·60	1·80	4·00	2·00	2·70	5·80	9·10	27·30	66·90	7·70	17·00
Occupational pension	0·50	1·50	1·60	3·10	2·80	5·50	6·60	15·60	30·70	61·40	8·40	17·40
Other*	0·40	0·10	0·10	0·30	0·20	0·20	0·80	0·50	0·80	0·90	0·50	0·40
GROSS INCOME	45·20	50·70	52·70	62·60	56·70	71·00	67·30	86·40	125·90	199·20	69·50	93·90
Deduction	4·70	8·20	3·90	7·50	3·60	7·40	6·00	10·60	24·50	41·80	8·50	15·10
NET INCOME (BHC) MEAN	40·50	42·50	48·80	55·10	53·10	63·50	61·30	75·80	101·50	157·40	61·00	78·80
NET INCOME (AHC) MEAN	31·70	30·90	39·40	43·20	42·60	47·80	49·50	64·50	89·00	149·50	50·40	67·10
NET INCOME (BHC) MEDIAN	41·80	44·00	49·90	55·70	55·30	64·70	61·70	74·70	87·90	127·70	54·30	64·00
NET INCOME (AHC) MEDIAN	33·40	34·20	39·40	43·30	43·30	47·20	49·80	64·10	77·10	122·00	42·50	46·90

Source:
Family expenditure survey.

(b) Pensioner couples

Average income (£ per week, 1989 prices)

Income source	*Quintile 1*		*Quintile 2*		*Quintile 3*		*Quintile 4*		*Quintile 5*		*Total*	
	1979	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*
Earnings*	0·20	0·50	1·10	0·40	4·90	6·90	23·20	16·20	79·20	70·40	21·60	18·80
Benefit income	70·80	78·70	77·20	86·50	77·00	82·70	73·00	80·90	65·30	74·50	72·60	80·70
Investment income	2·30	3·70	3·10	6·60	4·80	14·10	8·90	24·20	53·60	120·20	14·50	33·70
Occupational pension	2·20	5·00	6·10	12·70	15·90	26·30	31·80	54·80	79·80	130·20	27·00	45·70
Other*	0·20	0·30	0·30	0·40	1·40	0·40	0·70	0·60	0·90	0·70	0·70	0·50
GROSS INCOME	75·70	88·20	87·70	106·50	104·00	130·50	137·50	176·60	278·70	396·00	136·50	179·40
Deduction	5·10	9·90	4·70	10·20	6·90	14·50	15·20	22·90	66·90	89·00	19·70	29·30
NET INCOME (BHC) MEAN	70·60	78·40	83·00	96·30	97·10	115·90	122·30	153·70	211·80	307·00	116·80	150·10
NET INCOME (AHC) MEAN	58·70	65·20	69·10	81·60	83·20	105·20	107·10	145·60	190·10	295·30	101·50	138·50
NET INCOME (BHC) MEDIAN	70·80	80·20	82·20	96·20	95·30	114·50	120·60	152·80	183·10	253·30	95·60	114·50
NET INCOME (AHC) MEDIAN	58·90	68·90	68·40	81·20	81·30	105·10	106·40	145·00	164·50	242·90	82·10	105·10

Source:
Family expenditure survey.

(c) Pensioner units

Average income (£ per week, 1989 prices)

Income source	*Quintile 1*		*Quintile 2*		*Quintile 3*		*Quintile 4*		*Quintile 5*		*Total*	
	1979	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*	*1979*	*1989*
Earnings*	0·30	0·20	0·40	0·30	0·70	1·70	8·70	6·50	43·30	38·50	10·70	9·40
Benefit income	52·00	55·50	59·10	67·70	57·50	67·80	58·20	68·80	55·90	61·70	56·50	64·30
Investment income	1·90	3·10	2·30	4·60	2·50	5·50	7·00	15·60	36·50	86·80	10·00	23·10
Occupational pension	1·10	2·40	3·20	6·00	5·30	10·20	14·30	30·00	50·40	89·70	14·80	27·60
Other*	0·30	0·20	0·20	0·30	0·40	0·30	1·20	0·50	0·70	0·80	0·60	0·40
GROSS INCOME	55·50	61·50	65·20	78·90	66·50	85·40	89·40	121·40	186·70	277·50	92·70	124·90
Deduction	4·80	8·70	4·20	8·30	4·30	9·20	8·40	15·20	40·20	59·70	12·40	20·20
NET INCOME (BHC) MEAN	50·70	52·80	61·00	70·60	62·20	76·20	81·00	106·20	146·60	217·80	80·30	104·70
NET INCOME (AHC) MEAN	43·80	43·40	48·10	51·60	51·50	64·90	69·10	98·30	128·00	206·90	68·10	93·00
NET INCOME (BHC) MEDIAN	44·50	48·10	51·80	60·50	56·70	67·30	70·50	95·10	135·10	179·90	64·00	78·70
NET INCOME (AHC) MEDIAN	36·10	38·00	39·90	44·10	44·10	52·30	56·00	85·90	117·30	171·60	53·00	68·60

Source: Family expenditure survey.

(d) Growth in pensioner income 1979 to 1989
Average income change

Per cent.

Income source	Quintile 1			Quintile 2			Quintile 3			Quintile 4			Quintile 5			Total		
	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U	[1]S	[2]C	[3]U
Earnings[4]	−81	108	−24	177	−62	−29	−37	41	135	−40	−30	−25	−13	−11	−11	−17	−13	−12
Benefit income	10	11	7	12	12	15	21	7	18	16	11	18	12	14	10	15	11	14
Investment income	54	63	68	125	117	102	35	193	117	59	173	122	145	124	138	121	133	130
Occupational pension	181	131	127	99	109	87	100	66	92	137	73	110	100	63	78	107	69	86
Other[4]	−74	31	−45	131	15	53	−1	−73	−27	−40	−21	−58	5	−22	21	−17	−34	−24
Gross income	12	17	11	19	21	21	25	25	28	28	28	36	58	42	49	35	31	35
Deduction	75	94	81	94	118	99	104	110	114	75	51	80	71	33	49	77	49	63
Net income (BHC) median	5	13	8	12	17	17	17	20	19	21	27	35	45	38	33	[5]29	[5]29	[5]30
Net income (AHC) median	2	17	5	10	19	11	9	29	19	29	36	53	58	48	46	[5]33	[5]36	[5]37

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

[1] Single pensioners.
[2] Pensioner couples.
[3] Pensioner units.
[4] Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at.
[5] Mean.

Notes:

1. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After Housing costs—AHC.
2. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
3. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
4. Pension units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.
5. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts shown in the table.
6. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.

Table 2: Investment income for pensioner units of all ages

(a) Pensioner couples

Quintile (Q1 = lowest)	Percentage of units in receipt		Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week)		
	1979	1989	1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	56	66	4·00	4·70	18
Q2	67	55	4·60	8·40	83
Q3	68	59	7·10	15·80	123
Q4	76	71	11·80	26·10	121
Q5	90	93	59·30	124·40	110
All	71	87	20·30	38·80	91

(b) Single pensioners

Quintile (Q1 = lowest)	Percentage of units in receipt		Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week)		
	1979	1989	1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	49	65	3·50	4·00	14
Q2	49	58	3·60	6·90	92
Q3	45	57	4·40	4·70	7
Q4	62	71	9·20	12·70	38
Q5	78	91	34·90	73·30	110
All	57	69	13·60	24·90	83

(c) All pensioner units

Quintile (Q1 = lowest)	Percentage of units in receipt		Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week)		
	1979	1989	1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	52	70	3·60	4·40	22
Q2	55	64	4·10	7·20	76
Q3	50	66	5·00	8·30	66
Q4	68	82	10·30	18·90	83
Q5	83	93	44·20	92·80	109
All	62	75	16·30	30·70	88

Table 3
Investment income for recently retired pensioner units

(a) Pensioner couples

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt		Average amount for those in receipt £ per week		
	1979	1989	1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	65	81	5·90	7·50	••
Q2					••
Q3					••
Q4	84	91	39·90	61·70	••
Q5					••
All	73	87	21·60	41·50	92

(b) Single pensioners

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	47	48	12·60	31·50	**
Q2					**
Q3					**
Q4	70	75			**
Q5					**
All	60	64	12·60	31·50	150

(c) All pensioner units

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	50	63	4·20	7·20	71
Q2	56	72			
Q3	68	76	7·50	13·10	75
Q4	77	83	13·30	25·00	88
Q5	87	95	48·00	112·90	135
All	68	78	18·20	38·10	109

Table 4
Occupational pension for pensioner units of all ages
(a) Pensioner couples

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	38	48	9·10	15·70	73
Q2	59	66			
Q3	77	81	21·70	32·10	48
Q4	79	89	41·70	61·20	47
Q5	74	81	113·80	160·80	41
All	65	73	43·80	62·70	43

(b) Single pensioners

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	11	21	9·50	10·00	**
Q2	20	32			**
Q3	25	42		15·20	**
Q4	44	62	16·20	27·90	72
Q5	59	78	56·10	86·30	54
All	32	47	29·00	41·60	43

(c) All pensioner units

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	20	29	6·00	9·10	52
Q2	34	43	10·30	14·60	42
Q3	38	55	15·70	20·60	31
Q4	60	74	26·80	41·70	56
Q5	65	81	80·90	117·00	45
All	43	56	36·70	52·10	42

Table 5
Occupational Pension for recently retired pensioner unit
(a) Pensioner couples

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1					
Q2	63	71	20·80	27·70	33
Q3					
Q4					
Q5	76	82	89·10	114·50	29
All	68	75	51·50	65·60	27

(b) Single pensioners

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1	28	38	*	41·40	**
Q2					
Q3					
Q4	43	67			
Q5					
All	37	55	*	41·40	**

(c) All pensioners

Quintile Q1 = lowest	Percentage of units in receipt 1979	1989	Average amount for those in receipt £ per week 1979	1989	Per cent. growth
Q1					
Q2	47	58	18·10	22·60	25
Q3					
Q4					
Q5	67	81	74·60	96·10	29
All	55	67	45·90	58·00	26

Notes to tables 2-5:

(i) A pensioner unit is defined as a single pensioner aged above state pensionable age (SPA) or a pensioner couple where the husband is aged over SPA.

(ii) A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a single pensioner aged less than five years above SPA or a pensioner couple where the husband is aged less than five years above SPA.

(iii) * denotes where low sample sizes make any estimate unreliable.

(iv) ** denotes where percentage growth estimates are inappropriate.

(v) Where single quintile estimates are not reliable, due to low numbers of sample cases, an estimate is given for a number of combined quintiles

(vi) All amounts are given at 1989 prices.

(vii) Tables 1 and 3 are based on the separate income distributions for single pensioners, pensioner couples and all pensioner units respectively. Tables 2 and 4 are based on separate income distributions for recently retired single pensioners, pensioner couples and all pensioner units respectively.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what additional provision for annual recurring expenditure in his Department has been made following rulings of the European Court of Justice in each year since the implementation of the Single European Act.

Miss Widdecombe: Special provisions are made only on a case-by-case basis, for annual recurring expenditure as a result of cases referred to the European Court of Justice. None of these cases arose as a result of the Single European Act, which does not contain any specific measures relating to social security. Provision for expenditure since 1 July 1987 is in the table.

	£ million
1988-89	3·0
1989-90	3·0
1990-91	8·3
1991-92	13·7
1992-93	23·5

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action the Government intend to take following the statement by the Under-Secretary of State in a letter dated 7 April to the hon. Member for Walsall, North that local authorities including Walsall were in breach of the law as regards the concessionary fares for those in receipt of the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: Walsall council has undertaken to ensure that its concessionary travel scheme complies with the law. We intend to remind all local authorities that, in accordance with section 73(14) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, they must not refuse concessionary fares, or levy a contribution towards the cost of them, specificallly because a person receives the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Non-contributary Benefits

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the social security and other benefits available at national, county and local level, to which persons arriving in the United Kingdom are and are not entitled if they have not paid United Kingdom taxes or national insurance contributions.

Mr. Burt: The administration of benefits in Great Britain is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for the arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Terence Higgins, dated 7 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will list the Social Security and any other benefits available at national, county and local level, to which persons arriving in the United Kingdom are and are not entitled to if they have not paid United Kingdom taxes or National Insurance contributions.

I should point out that, although benefits may be administered locally they are national benefits. I enclose a copy of leaflet FB2 which lists all social security benefits which are available. Entitlement is dependent on a person's individual circumstances. Most Social Security benefits employ a residence or contribution test and so are not immediately available to those entering Great Britain. However, the usual entitlement conditions may be modified if the applicant has either come from an EC country and is able to take advantage of EC regulations concerning Social Security for migrant workers or has come from a country with which the United Kingdom has concluded a Reciprocal Social Security Agreement.

Income Support is an exception since it has to serve as a safety net. Entitlement depends on immigration status. All those people who have a right to live in the UK permanently, including those who have been granted refugee status, may receive benefit if they satisfy all other relevant conditions of entitlement. It would be inconsistent to allow people to make their home in this country and then deny them financial support in times of need.

People who are applying for refugee status, that is asylum seekers, are not entitled to benefits under the normal rules. However, decisions on refugee status are very complex and take a long time to determine. While these questions are being considered, such customers can receive Income Support at a reduced rate under the Urgent Cases Rules.

All Benefits Agency offices have comprehensive written guidance on how to deal with claims from people from abroad. Our procedures for processing such claims involve close liaison with the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department.

I also understand that these people can claim Housing Benefit from their Local Authority subject to the normal rules but this may affect their right to stay in the country.

I hope this information is helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Income Support

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support there are *(a)* in total, *(b)* who are single parents, *(c)* who are signing on as unemployed, *(d)* who are disabled and *(e)* who are pensioners (i) at each of the Benefits Agency offices having customers in Derbyshire and (ii) who are resident in Derbyshire.

Mr. Burt: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 7 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many claimants of Income Support there are *(a)* in total, *(b)* who are single parents, *(c)* who are signing on as unemployed, *(d)* who are disabled and *(e)* who are pensioners (i) at each of the Benefits Agency offices having customers in Derbyshire and (ii) who are resident in Derbyshire.

The complete range of information requested is not available except at a disproportionate cost. This is because

information regarding the number of Income Support recipients who are either lone parents or disabled are not routinely collected, nor do we collect information on the basis of county of residence.

I have appended the latest available statistics relating to each of the Benefits Agency offices in Derbyshire. The figures relating to those customers who receive either a lone parent or a disability premium will not equate exactly to the number of lone parents or disabled people. This is because a single parent may be in receipt of a more advantageous premium, and a person in receipt of a disability premium may not necessarily be registered as disabled. You should also note that, for Income Support purposes, a pensioner is a person of either sex aged 60 or more.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Income support statistics for benefits agency offices in Derbyshire as at 28 February 1993

Derby (London Road) office:	
Signing unemployed	5,850
Pensioners	4,104
Receiving lone parent premium	3,352
Receiving disability premium	1,071
Total recipients	16,000
Derby (Becket Street) office:	
Signing unemployed	6,644
Pensioners	6,798
Receiving lone parent premium	2,426
Receiving disability premium	1,224
Total recipients	19,078
Ilkeston office:	
Signing unemployed	4,899
Pensioners	3,275
Receiving lone parent premium	2,311
Receiving disability premium	1,090
Total recipients	12,851
Buxton office:	
Signing unemployed	835
Pensioners	1,011
Receiving lone parent premium	357
Receiving disability premium	184
Total recipients	2,611
Chesterfield office:	
Signing unemployed	7,917
Pensioners	6,650
Receiving lone parent premium	2,782
Receiving disability premium	1,574
Total recipients	21,177

Domestic Violence

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Attorney General what guidelines the Crown Prosecution Service has on prosecutions in cases of domestic violence.

The Attorney-General *[pursuant to his reply, 2 March, Official Report, c. 76]:* The Crown Prosecution Service has updated its guidance to staff on the review and prosecution of domestic violence cases.

The service has provided a copy of its statement of prosecution policy on domestic violence to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry on domestic violence and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The service is distributing the policy statement to interested agencies.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 May 1993

PRIME MINISTER

Political Parties (Funding)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister whether the Government will introduce legislation whereby political parties represented in the House will have to declare all moneys received from overseas.

The Prime Minister: We have no plans to do so.

Friends of Bosnia

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the organisation Friends of Bosnia in Liverpool; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: So far as I am aware, none.

Bogus Marriages

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the number of undetected bogus marriages taking place in the United Kingdom; and if he will appoint a senior Cabinet Minister to co-ordiinate an investigation into the abuse of the marriage laws, the extent to which this is facilitating illegal overstaying, circumvention of the immigration laws and the acquisition of British citizenship; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No realistic estimate can be made of the number of undetected bogus marriages, but superintendent registrars are alert to the need to report to the Registrar General where they have reason to believe that a marriage has been arranged solely for the purpose of circumventing immigration controls. Where this also involved a lawful impediment to the marriage, the superintendent registrar would not proceed with the ceremony.

Where the Registrar General believes that a marriage is prima facie one of convenience, the facts are passed to the Home Office to take whatever action is necessary to enforce the immigration law.

These arrangements will be kept under review, but I doubt whether an investigation of the kind suggested would increase their effectiveness. I shall, however, draw to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health the information that my hon. Friend has sent me.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Service

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Employment Service annual performance agreement for 1993-94 will be published.

Mrs. Shephard: I have today placed copies of the Employment Service annual performance agreement for 1993-94 in the Library.

May Day

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations she has held with the representatives of diary and calendar printers about the proposed abolition of the May day bank holiday; what consideration was given to their views; if her proposed change in the date of the bank holiday will take place in 1994; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department published a consultation document on the May day bank holiday on 1 December. Responses to the consultation document were received from a wide range of organisations, including some from within the dairy and calendar industry.

An announcement on the future of the May day bank holiday will be made shortly.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she will take to ensure that employees receive a written statement of terms and conditions of employment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, significantly enhances the statutory right to a written statement of main terms and conditions of employment, reducing from 13 weeks to two months the period within which it must be provided and extending entitlement to employees working between eight and 16 hours a week, who have hitherto had to complete five years continuous service in order to qualify.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals she will bring forward to protect employees of under two years standing whose employers have not issued a written statement of terms and conditions of employment and persistently fail to provide one.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Employees who have not received a written statement to which they are entitled under the provisions of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 may refer the matter to an industrial tribunal.

Clause 28 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, introduces a new provision making it automatically unfair for an employer to dismiss an employee, regardless of length of service or hours of work, for having sought in good faith to exercise a statutory employment protection right, including the right to a written statement.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish the numbers and percentages of her staff in grades one to five who each have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants, *(e)* have post-graduate qualifications in management and *(f)* who were educated in (i) local authority and (ii) private schools.

Mr. McLoughlin: The percentage of staff who have degrees are listed in the following table:

Grade 1—total staff in post = 1
No degrees held

Grade 2—total staff in post = 3
100 per cent. of Grade 2s have a degree in science
33 per cent of Grade 2s have a degree in arts

Grade 3—total staff in post = 17
35 per cent. of Grade 3s have a degree in science
24 per cent. of Grade 3s have a degree in arts
5 per cent. of Grade 3s have a qualification in management

Grade 4—total staff in post = 8
50 per cent. of Grade 4s have a degree in science
25 per cent. of Grade 4s have a degree in arts
37 per cent. of Grade 4s have a qualification in management

Grade 5—total staff in post = 89
29 per cent. of Grade 5s have a degree in science
22 per cent. of Grade 5s have a degree in arts
10 per cent. of Grade 5s have a qualification in management
1 per cent. of Grade 5s are qualified accountants.

Laboratory Technicians

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many grades of laboratory technician are registered in the United Kingdom; and how many are designated as medical laboratory scientific officers.

Mr. McLoughlin: No information of this kind is held by the Employment Department.

Oil and Gas

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the number of people employed in *(a)* onshore and *(b)* offshore oil and gas related activity in (i) 1991 and (ii) 1992; and what is her estimate of the total at the latest available date.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are no separate figures for onshore and offshore oil and gas related activity.

The available information is as follows:

Employees in employment: Great Britain

	February 1991	*February 1992*	*February 1993*
Extraction of mineral oil and natural gas	[1] 50,000	n/a	n/a
Mineral oil processing	18,000	17,000	16,000
Public gas supply	78,000	78,000	75,000

[1] The latest estimate available is taken from the September 1991 census of employment.

Working Hours

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the average number of hours per week worked by people in full-time employment inclusive of any overtime.

Mr. McLoughlin: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey show that in autumn 1992 (September—November), people in full-time employment worked on average 45 hours per week including overtime (not seasonally adjusted).

Small Business Support Schemes

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what studies her Department has undertaken of the effectiveness of small business support schemes delivered by training and enterprise councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department currently has responsibility for the business start-up scheme (BSUS), (formerly enterprise allowance), which assists unemployed people to set up a business. The following studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of BSUS since training and enterprise councils (TECs) took over responsibility for its delivery:

"Enterprise Allowance Scheme: Evaluation of Development Projects", PIEDA, 1992.

"Enterprise Allowance/Business Start Up: A Survey of TEC Schemes", IFF Research Ltd., 1992.

The Department regularly carries out evaluation of all its major programmes, including the BSUS, and will continue to do so.

A number of other small business support measures run by TECs are now the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give for each travel-to-work area and jobcentre area in Scotland the absolute change in the numbers of unemployed claimants between February and March and, for the same period, the numbers of claimants, (i) obtaining paid employments, (ii) entering into Government training schemes, (iii) being transferred to other benefits, (iv) being removed from the claimant count for reasons other than entering employment, (v) failing the actively seeking work test and (vi) having benefit disqualified.

Mr. McLoughlin: Statistical information is not routinely collected on the reasons why people cease to claim unemployment related benefits.

Figures on the net monthly changes in total claimant unemployment and the flows in and out of claimant unemployment for each parliamentary constituency, local authority area, travel-to-work area, and jobcentre area in Scotland can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

31. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has held with Civil Service unions concerning the impact of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 on the policy of market testing civil service jobs.

Mr. Waldegrave: My ministerial colleagues and I have meetings with the civil service unions from time to time to discuss the range of Government policies.

38. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether his Department will issue up-to-date figures for savings achieved by market testing of Government services.

Mr. Waldegrave: In previous years, savings arising from market testing have typically been around 25 per cent. of the original cost even where the activity has remained in-house. Savings from the programme for the period ending on 30 September 1993 are not yet available. When they are, I am sure that they will show significant savings in costs and improvements in quality, such as reliability and timeliness.

Citizens Charters

37. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a further statement on the workings of the citizens charters.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Since my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 25 November 1992 the citizens charter has brought about further significant achievements. These include three new and one revised charter, the announcement of a complaints adjudicator for the Inland Revenue, and the launch of the second charter mark scheme. We shall publish a further White Paper in due course to record achievements across all public services.

Public Servants (Freemasons)

39. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he has taken to require declarations of interest by public servants who are freemasons.

Mr. Robert Jackson: As I said in reply to the hon. Member on 29 March at col. 14, an amendment to the civil service code is to be published shortly. The amendment will remind civil servants that freemasonry is among the possible sources of conflicts of interest which should be reported if and when they occur. A copy of the amendment will be placed in the Library of the House when published.

Hall I'th Wood Museum, Bolton

40. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to visit Hall I'th Wood Museum, Bolton, to discuss measures to increase awareness of science amongst the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my hon. Friend knows, I visited his constituency on 30 March this year. I am very happy to discuss with him measures to increase the public understanding of science.

Science White Paper

41. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consultations he has undertaken on his proposed White Paper on science.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have consulted working scientists and industry, professional bodies, research charities and many others in order to prepare for the forthcoming White Paper on science and technology. I have published over 250 of the written submissions I have received.

Fourth Framework Programme

42. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how he will secure the maximum opportunity for United Kingdom interests within the fourth framework programme.

Mr. Jackson: United Kingdom research teams take an active part in EC programmes, and in negotiating the fourth framework programme we shall aim to ensure that it reflects United Kingdom research needs. We shall also advertise the opportunities to carry out research under EC programmes as widely as possible throughout the United Kingdom science and technology community.

Small Firms

43. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the Government intend to introduce a citizens charter for small firms.

Mr. Jackson: No. When service providers publish a charter they should set out standards of service to meet the needs of all the various users. Of course these include small firms, to which the Government attach great importance.

Research Councils

Sir Giles Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the research councils have now issued their corporate plans 1993.

Mr. Jackson: All five of the research councils have issued their corporate plans 1993.

Charters (Compensation)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the total amount of compensation the state paid out on all charters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The total amount of compensation paid out by organisations which have charters is set out as follows:

	Cost (rounded to nearest £000)	*From*	*To*
BR passengers charter	1,000·0	May 1992	May 1993
London Underground Limited customers charter	41·0	August 1992	January 1993
Benefits Agency customer charter	1,058·0	April 1992	September 1992
Jobseekers charter	89·0	April 1992	March 1993
Contributions Agency employers and contributors charters	63·0	April 1992	March 1993
Northern Ireland Railways passengers charter	0·4	November 1992	April 1993
Travellers charter	9·0	January 1992	March 1993
Total	2,260·4		

In addition to this, in the financial year 1992-93 the Inland Revenue paid £389,000 in compensations for

"serious error" as defined in the code of practice "Mistakes by the Inland Revenue". Customs and Excise has paid £315,000 in ex-gratia payments.

Office of Science and Technology

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide figures for expenditure for the Office of Science and Technology for *(a)* technology transfer and *(b)* industrial innovation (i) for the past five years and (ii) as projected for the next three years.

Mr. Jackson: The table lists the expenditure by the Office of Science and Technology for the "technology transfer" component of the primary purpose classification of research and development, as defined in the 1992 edition of the Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development. Information is not available under the heading "industrial innovation" as there is, as yet, no accepted standard definition of the term. The table lists the Office's expenditure under the primary purpose category "technology support", which includes strategic and applied research and pre-competitive schemes such as LINK.

Year	*Technology transfer £ million*	*Technology support £ million*
1988-89	4·9	[1]—
1989-90	4·0	209·0
1990-91	4·6	238·0
1991-92	6·1	243·9
1992-93	6·8	289·6
1993-94	8·7	326·9
1994-95	8·9	347·2
1995-96	9·1	358·1

[1] Note: The primary purpose classifications were changed between 1988-89 and 1989-90 with the introduction of a new class "technology support", but did not affect "technology transfer".

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BNFL Contracts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial safeguards exist to protect British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. in its contracts with Scottish Nuclear and Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Eggar: This is a commercial matter for the companies involved.

Nuclear Reprocessing Contracts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the role of his Department in the Nuclear Electric/Scottish Nuclear/BNFL discussions about re-processing contracts at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant.

Mr. Eggar: The negotiations are a commercial matter for the companies involved.

Civil Aviation Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish his Department's report, drawn up by its aviation committee, into future DTI funding for civil aviation research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 4 May 1993, *Official Report*, column 5.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how long his Department has been in possession of its aviation committee's report into future DTI funding for civil aircraft research; and what action he has taken in light of its conclusions.

Mr. Heseltine: The national strategic technology acquisition plan for aeronautics was formally presented to my Department on 4 November 1992; the committee's proposals are being considered.

Betws Colliery

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to allow the running of Betws colliery to be taken over by the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal is committed to offering to the private sector pits which it no longer wishes to operate, including Betws. The Government welcome this commitment.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent inquiries there have been from the private sector into the possibility of taking over the running of Betws colliery: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have recently had a number of discussions with representatives of the private mining sector about a range of matters.

British Coal is, of course, committed to offering to the private sector pits which it no longer wishes to operate and is keen to begin this process as rapidly as possible.

Developmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the numbers and percentages of his staff in grades 1 to 5 who have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants and *(e)* have postgraduate qualifications in management.

Mr. Eggar: Of the 328 people in grades 1 to 5 who are on the permanent staff of the Department of Trade and Industry, 176 (54 per cent.) have arts degrees, 86 (26 per cent.) have science degrees and 21 (6 per cent.) have technical degrees. There are 10 qualified accountants and 10 whose records indicate postgraduate qualifications in management.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Darling: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many exploration and appointed oil and gas wells were drilled in the United Kingdom continental shelf fin 1992; and what is his estimate of the number to be drilled in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995.

Mr. Eggar: Seventy two explorations and 57 appraisal wells were drilled in 1992. My Department does not publish forecasts for the number of wells. It does, however,

conduct regular surveys of company plans for drilling wells looking up to two years ahead. The results of the last survey were published in the August 1992 issues of "Energy Trends", a copy of which is in the Library.

Companies House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place a copy in the Library of the information letter on the stage 2 privatisation options exercise circulated to all members of the staff of Companies house in the last week of April; what date he has set for the completion of the stage 2 exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have placed in the Library a copy of the notice to staff requested by the hon. Member. The consultants have been asked to complete their report by the end of July.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the state of the British leather goods manufacturing industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 6 may 1993]:* The leather goods manufacturing industry (Standard Industrial Classification Group 442) had total United Kingdom sales of £213 million in 1991. Employment, in 1990, of 10,800 is concentrated largely in small units, three quarters of which have fewer 10 employees and none over a 100. International trade is significant: imports account for some 77 per cent of United Kingdom consumption and the United Kingdom industry exports 54 per cent. of its output. An ecouraging feature is that since 1986 exports have been growing more rapadily than imports—13 per cent. per annum and 8 per cent per annum respective respectively.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those next steps agencies within his responsibility that he plans to privatise.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 22 April 1993]:* The prospects for privatising the agencies in my Department are kept continually under review. Since it was established in 1990 as an executive agency the National Engineering Laboratory has been working towards full commercial viability with a view to privatisation: it continues to work towards that objective. I announced a specific review of Companies House in July 1992, which is continuing. I have just announced a study on the long term future of the DTI laboratories: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 4 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *4*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Population Programmes

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions for 1993 are being made to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organisation human reproduction programme.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information is as follows:

	£ million
IPPF	[1]7·5
UNFPA	[1]7·0
WHO/HRP	3·0

[1] Core grant. Additional contributions for specific programme activities will also be made.

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government have taken to ensure that funding to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Population Fund is not used in coercive population control measures.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: IPPF and UNFPA, like Her Majesty's Government, are firmly opposed to any population activities in which there is any element of coercion of individuals to practise family planning, or to accept any particular type of contraception. Their population programmes fully accord with the human rights principles set out in the world population plan of action.

We examine annually with other donor Governments IPPF and UNFPA policies and programmes at the IPPF donors meeting and UNFPA Governing Council respectively. We are also in regular consultation with IPPF and UNFPA about their population activities.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the total United Kingdom bilateral disbursements on population activities and to which countries for each of the years 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Total aid programme disbursements on population activities amounted to some £26·5 million in 1991 and £28 million in 1992, of which £7·2 million and £6·1 million respectively represented bilateral disbursements. This bilateral assistance was distributed as follows:

	1991 £	*1992* £
Ethiopia	37,249	8,159
Ghana	469,000	771,918
Kenya	606,829	1,812,248
Malawi	100,000	185,932
Nigeria	20,000	47,490
Sierra Leone	39,742	—
Tanzania	101,207	129,266
Uganda	11,143	105,874
Zambia	3,280	27,594
Bangladesh	2,667,706	586,254
India	2,380,073	1,629,931
Malaysia	150,196	100,245
Pakistan	613,181	208,979
Anguilla	39,500	—
Madagascar	—	2,631
Zimbabwe	—	29,372
South Africa[1]	—	84,155
Nepal	—	139,952
Fiji	—	2,000
Vietnam	—	147,351
Vanuatu	—	13,126
Paraguay	—	3,116
Occupied territories	—	11,250
Caribbean	—	6,650

[1] South African non-governmental organisation.

Tree Planting

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking in response to the evaluation carried out at the request of the Overseas Development Administration of four tree-planting projects funded by British aid in Lesotho, Kenya, Ivory Coast and southern India.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: These projects, started during the 1970s and early 1980s, were completed between 1987 and 1991. The evaluations were undertaken after their conclusion in order better to assess their overall impact. The lessons drawn from them have been carefully noted, both by Overseas Development Administration staff responsible for similar projects including any follow-on work in the four countries, and by the Commonwealth Development Corporation which co-financed the Côte d'Ivoire project. We are preparing formal written guidance, based on the findings and lessons of these and other forestry evaluations, for use in identifying, appraising, implementing and monitoring forestry projects.

Eritrea

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all current United Kingdom assistance to aid development projects in Eritrea and the cost in each case.

Mr. Lennox Boyd: Past British aid to Eritrea has been included in the British aid programme to Ethiopia. This includes grants to NGOs working in Ethiopia and Eritrea, expected to total around £1 million in 1993-94. We recently made a contribution of over £250,000 towards the United Nations verification mission to the Eritrean referendum, including four observers and supporting equipment.

We have been discussing with the Eritrean authorities a separate development aid programme for 1993-94, for which £500,000 has been allocated. This will include 17 United Kingdom training awards, costing £187,000; other elements will be agreed in the coming months.

Angola

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the levels of humanitarian aid to the civilian population of Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 30 April 1993]:* The return to civil war in Angola has made it very difficult to assess need and deliver aid to the civilian population of Angola. We have provided some humanitarian relief already and are keen to do more where we are confident that it will reach its intended beneficiaries. We are monitoring the situation closely with international agencies and non-governmental organisations.

SCOTLAND

War Crimes

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Crown Office has yet received a report about the Gecas case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not the normal practice of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate to disclose the names of individuals who may be under investigation or to comment on the stage that any particular inquiries may have reached.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the total cost incurred in respect of war crime investigations in Scotland in each of the last five years;

(2) how many prosecutions in respect of war crimes are being contemplated in respect of Scotland for the current year;

(3) how many people in Scotland *(a)* have been investigated over the last five years and *(b)* are currently being investigated in respect of alleged war crimes committed during the second world war.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total cost incurred in respect of war crimes investigations in Scotland in 1991-92 was £267,520. For 1992-93 the latest available figures show that the cost was £352,966. Costs did not arise before those financial years.

It has never been the practice of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate or his predecessors to disclose, at the stage of investigations and before investigations are complete, whether or not prosecutions are being contemplated. In the course of the investigations conducted over the past two years allegations against 17 named individuals have been, or are being, considered and investigated in Scotland.

Local Government

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the public Acts of Parliament passed since the general election of 1979 which have affected the duties, powers and responsibilities of local government in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* The list gives the most readily identifiable Acts passed since the general election of 1979 which are extant and affect the duties, powers and responsibilities of local government in Scotland.

Access to Personal Files Act 1987
Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Act 1991
Children Act 1989
Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991
Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982
Civil Protection in Peacetime Act 1986
Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991
Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989
Consumer Protection Act 1987
Estate Agents Act 1979
Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1982
Disabled Persons Act 1981
Estate Agents Act 1979
Education Schools Act 1992
Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Environmental Protection Act 1990
Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987
Food and Safety Act 1990
Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984
Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992
Health and Local Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983
Housing Act 1988
Housing and Planning Act 1986
Housing Associations Act 1985
Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
Housing (Scotland) Act 1988
Local Authorities (Expenditure Powers) Act 1983
Local Government Act 1986

Local Government Act 1988
Local Government Act 1992
Local Government and Housing Act 1989
Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982
Local Government Finance Act 1988
Local Government Finance Act 1992
Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991
Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980
Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981
Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984
Motor Cycle Noise Act 1987
National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990
Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991
Planning and Compensation Act 1991
Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993
Property Misdescriptions Act 1991
Public Order Act 1986
Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984
Registered Establishments (Scotland) Act 1987
Rent (Scotland) Act 1984
Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985, 1989 and 1990
Roads and Streets Act 1991
Roads (Scotland) Act 1984
School Boards (Scotland) Act 1980
Self-Governing Schools Etc (Scotland) Act 1989
Social Security Act 1986
Social Security Administration Act 1992
Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992
Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Act 1992
Solvent Abuse (Scotland) Act 1983
Telecommunications Act 1984
Town and Country Planning Act 1984
Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Act 1985
Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981
Transport Act 1985
Water Act 1989
Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985
Water (Scotland) Act 1980
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
Zoo Licensing Act 1981

Cancer Screening

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women were screened for breast and cervical cancer in each year since 1987 within *(a)* the Argyll and Clyde health board area, *(b)* the Greater Glasgow health board area and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; if he will estimate in each case the percentage of women in the age range from 20 to 60 years who availed themselves of these tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* The information requested is currently being compiled and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Medical Staff

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many consultant medical oncologists, radiotherapists and general surgeons are employed on *(a)* a full-time basis and *(b)* a part-time basis in each of the health boards.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* The numbers of consultants in the specialties of medical oncology, radiotherapy and general surgery employed on a full-time basis and a part-time basis at 30 September 1992, the latest date for which information is available, are given in the following annex.

Consultants in selected specialties
By contract status and health board
As at 30 September 1992

Specialty/contract	*Scotland*	*Argyll and Clyde*	*Ayrshire and Arran*	*Borders*	*Dumfries and Galloway*	*Fife*	*Forth Valley*	*Grampian*
Medical oncology								
Whole-time	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Part-time	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Radiotherapy								
Whole-time	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Part-time	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
General surgery								
Whole-time	136	12	8	3	4	7	8	11
Part-time	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	153	12	8	3	4	7	8	14

Notes:
(a) Whole-time includes maximum part-time appointments.
(b) Part-time includes clinical academic staff holding honorary appointments.

Consultants in selected specialties
by contract status and health board
as at 30 September 1992

Specialty/contract	*Greater Glasgow*	*Highland*	*Lanarkshire*	*Lothian*	*Orkney*	*Shetland*	*Tayside*	*Western Isles*
Medical oncology								
Whole-time	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Part-time	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Total	7	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Radiotherapy								
Whole-time	11	2	0	6	0	0	3	0
Part-time	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0

Specialty/contract	Greater Glasgow	Highland	Lanarkshire	Lothian	Orkney	Shetland	Tayside	Western Isles
Total	13	2	0	9	0	0	3	0
General surgery								
Whole-time	30	8	13	19	1	2	9	1
Part-time	8	0	0	2	0	0	3	1
Total	38	8	13	21	1	2	12	2

Notes:
(a) Whole-time includes maximum part-time appointments.
(b) Part-time includes clinical academic staff holding honorary appointments.

Cancer

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the seven most common malignant neoplasms amongst NHS patients; and what were the number of deaths brought about by each in the past five years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* The table gives the number of registrations of the seven most common cancers in men and women in Scotland in the period 1987-91 and the number of deaths from these forms of cancer in the same five-year period.

Numbers of registrations and deaths from the seven most common malignant neoplasms, by sex, Scotland 1987-91

Site of Cancer	Number of registrations	Number of deaths
Males		
Trachea, bronchus and lung	15,163	13,869
Non-melanoma skin cancer	9,560	121
Prostate	6,204	3,112
Colon	4,363	2,466
Bladder	4,241	1,535
Stomach	3,406	2,603
Rectum	2,534	1,524
Females		
Breast	13,913	6,379
Non-melanoma skin cancer	9,202	114
Trachea, bronchus and lung	8,078	7,131
Colon	5,563	3,273
Ovary	2,779	1,990
Stomach	2,370	1,915
Rectum	2,283	1,427

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet Mr. Rauf Denktash, the leader of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: None.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations are being made to Cyprus for Asil Nadir to be brought back to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have an extradition treaty with the Republic of Cyprus, but the writ of the lawful Government does not run in the north of the island.

Immediately after Nadir's abscondment, our high commissioner in Nicosia met Turkish Cypriot leader Mr. Denktash on 5 May to demand that Nadir be handed over to the British authorities.

On 7 May I summoned the Turkish ambassador to explain the anger felt in this country, and ask for Turkish assistance in ensuring Nadir's return.

The Turkish Cypriots should appreciate the damage it could do to their interests if they were to acquire a reputation as a refuge for fugitives from justice.

Libya

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are *(a)* currently serving sentences and *(b)* awaiting sentencing in Libyan prisons.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no British citizens serving sentences or awaiting sentences in Libyan prisons.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the numbers and percentages of his staff in grades one to five who each have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants, *(e)* have post-graduate qualifications in management and *(f)* who were educated in (i) local authority and (ii) private schools.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall write to the hon. Member with details as soon as they are available.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his response to the Libyan/Russian proposal at the United Nations for an international tribunal under United Nations auspices to try the two Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not aware of any such proposal.

Unpaid Parking Fines

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish figures recording the number of unpaid parking fines incurred by diplomatic missions in London during 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested by my hon. Friend is given in the table. The table also includes those international organisations which incurred unpaid fines. The figures may be reduced by late payments.

The total of 4,166 represents a 19 per cent. reduction from the same period in 1991 when 5,145 fines were incurred. This compares favourably with the same period in 1984 when almost 108,932 fines were recorded. We welcome this further reduction in unpaid parking fines and appreciate the cooperation of diplomatic missions and international organisations since the introduction of the parking policy. We shall continue to monitor carefully the level of unpaid fines and pressure diplomatic missions to reduce this still further.

Unpaid parking fines

Diplomatic mission	*1992*	*1991*
Turkey	245	130
Russia	226	363
France	182	95
Nigeria	167	159
China	159	140
Greece	153	150
United Arab Emirates	128	21
Saudi Arabia (1991 includes Libyan Interests Sec.)	127	200
Zambia	117	63
Cote D'Ivoire	106	121
Israel	86	204
Korea	85	116
Kuwait	85	0
Tunisia	81	43
Thailand	80	72
Cameroon	70	38
Sudan	70	123
Poland	69	154
Egypt	68	78
India	66	73
Gambia	63	56
Romania	62	34
Cyprus	62	55
Uruguay	61	57
Hungary	60	68
Germany	60	65
Spain	60	45
Oman	59	52
Pakistan	57	97
Qatar	52	94
Morocco	48	117
Ghana	48	84
Libyan Interests Sec., Saudi Arabia	44	—
Portugal	42	40
Bangladesh	41	49
Zimbabwe	38	38
Jordan	38	89
Mauritius	38	13
Angola	35	11
Algeria	34	11
Bulgaria	33	81
Gabon	32	25
Barbados	29	54
Malaysia	27	26
United States	26	17
Brazil	25	26
Italy	25	34
Brunei	24	30
Tanzania	23	47
Syria	22	16
Zaire	20	7
Mexico	19	6
Senegal	19	2
Malawi	18	20
Bahrain	18	35
Finland	16	25
Venezuela	16	17
Lebanon	14	9
Ethiopia	14	27
Japan	14	16
Ireland	13	5
Yugoslavia	12	41
Iran	12	13
Kenya	12	6
Yemen	12	20
Jamaica	11	11
Nepal	11	7
Iraqi Interest Section, Jordan	11	38
Cuba	11	13
Canada	10	135
Lesotho	10	7
Philippines	10	8
Paraguay	10	6
Fiji	9	10
Afghanistan	9	0
Guyana	7	16
Burma	7	10
Guatemala	7	27
Peru	7	7
Uganda	7	5
Sierra Leone	6	28
Honduras	5	9
Austria	5	3
Malta	5	2
Australia	5	5
Chile	5	7
Indonesia	5	3
South Africa	5	2
East Caribbean States	5	13
Sweden	4	8
Belgium	4	6
Mongolia	4	9
Liberia	4	18
Former Czechoslovakia	4	6
Panama	3	14
Seychelles	3	4
Sri Lanka	3	3
Luxembourg	3	2
Mozambique	3	3
Lithuania	2	—
Armenia	2	—
Nicaragua	2	1
Netherlands	2	3
Colombia	2	0
Denmark	2	1
Switzerland	2	2
Vietnam	2	13
Trinidad and Tobago	2	7
Norway	2	4
Singapore	1	3
Botswana	1	1
Papua New Guinea	1	2
Bahamas	1	4
Iceland	1	3
Costa Rica	1	2
El Salvador	1	0
New Zealand	1	0
Togo (Embassy closed 30 September 1991)	0	8
Somalia (Embassy closed 2 January 1992)	0	5
Bolivia	0	9
Swaziland	0	1
Ecuador	0	1
Dominica	0	1
Benin	0	1
Argentina	0	1
Slovenia	0	—
Latvia	0	—
Ukraine	0	—
Grenada	0	0
Namibia	0	—
Croatia	0	—
Tonga	0	0
Estonia	0	—
Belize	0	0
Antigua and Barbuda	0	0
International organisations		
Commonwealth Secretariat	28	26
EBRD	8	—
INMARSAT	7	3
African Development Bank	5	—

Diplomatic mission	1992	1991
Coffee	2	2
WEU	1	0
IMO	1	1
EC	1	2
United Nations	0	0
Sugar	0	0
Cocoa	0	—
	4,166	4,575

Diplomatic Immunity

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many serious offences were alleged to have been committed in 1992 by persons entitled to diplomatic immunity; and how many foreign diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in that year as a result of alleged offences.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Thirty-three alleged serious offences by persons entitled to diplomatic immunity were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1992, as against 40 the previous year. "Serious offences" are defined in accordance with the report to the Foreign Affairs Committee, "The Abuse of Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges (1985)" as offences falling into a category which would in certain circumstances attract a maximum penalty of six months or more imprisonment. The majority involved drinking and driving and shoplifting.

Eight diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in 1992 following alleged offences, as against seven the previous year.

Overseas Trade Assistance

Mr. Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further plans he has to increase the assistance available overseas to businesses seeking to increase trade in other countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In consultation with the DTI (as our partners in Overseas Trade Services) we are constantly seeking ways to enhance the export services we offer to British industry.

EDUCATION

"How is Your Child Doing at School?"

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the total number of telephone calls and written requests for "How is Your Child Doing at School?"; and how many were distributed in each of the 10 languages listed in the advertisement on 27 April.

Mr. Forth: Responses to the first part of this campaign are still being compiled. My right hon. Friend will announce these in due course.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to announce his decision following the consultations on the common funding formula for grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: We are currently considering the responses to the first consultation paper on the common funding formula (CFF). In the light of that consideration we intend to issue a second consultation paper early in the summer as a further move towards the introduction of the CFF in a small number of pilot areas from April 1994.

NERIS Database

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total public expenditure on the NERIS service; what circumstances have led to it being wound up; what implications there are for the delivery of the national curriculum; what action he is taking to salvage the NERIS database; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: From 1985-86—the first year of investment—to date, the total Government investment in NERIS from my Department and three others was £5 million. The purpose of this was to develop the database service to a position in which NERIS would be fully self-sufficient, serving schools and colleges across the United Kingdom. It failed to do that and the number of subscriptions declined substantially last year to a figure of only some 2,200. It was therefore decided that no further public investment could be justified. The NERIS Trust is currently considering winding-up procedures.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures he intends to take to encourage people with disabilities to become teachers, nursery nurses or teachers' aides.

Mr. Boswell: The Department is in consultation with disabled teachers' interest groups prior to the revision of the Department's circular 1/88 "Physical and Mental Fitness to Teach of Teachers and of Entrants to Teacher Training". This will continue to stress that disability in itself does not mean a person is medically unfit to teach, but that the paramount consideration should be the health and welfare of pupils. Applicants need to take into account that employment in these areas can also make significant demands on an individual's strength and stamina.

Special Schools (Tests)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations he has received from the National Association for Special Educational Needs regarding the implementation of the standard assessment tests for seven-year-olds in special schools.

Mr. Forth: There is no record of my right hon. Friend having received any representations in recent months from the National Association for Special Educational Needs on testing.

We believe that children with special educational needs should follow the national curriculum and participate in its associated assessment arrangements wherever possible, so that they have access to the same education as other pupils. The School Examinations and Assessment Council has given guidance to schools about ways in which the tests for both seven and 14-year-olds might be modified or adapted for pupils with special needs, without compromising the results they yield, so that as wide a range of pupils as possible can benefit from them.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) of 30 April *Official Report*, column *555*, if he will give the corresponding information on surplus school places for Cleveland.

Mr. Forth: On the basis of the survey of school capacity carried out by the Department we estimate that in Cleveland in 1991 there were some 11,181 primary and 10,676 secondary surplus places, representing, respectively, 17 per cent. and 23 per cent. of total capacity.

Tests (Advertising)

Ms. Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide a breakdown of the £750,000 her Department recently spent on advertising the Government's view on the testing of school children.

Mr. Forth: The campaign is providing information to parents about this summer's tests. It involves the production, printing and distribution of the leaflet "How is Your Child Doing at School?". The leaflet has been distributed to schools and its availability advertised in the national press. The total cost of the campaign has been estimated at £750,000 although the final cost will depend on the number of requests for further leaflets.

Nursery Schools

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each Greater London borough, the percentages of children under five years old currently registered as attending local authority funded nursery schools; and if he will list for each of the boroughs what percentage of under fives attended maintained nursery schools in 1986, 1988, 1990 and 1992.

Mr. Forth: Participation rates for January 1992—the latest date for which information is available—are shown in the table. Because of recent revisions to the population estimates to take account of the provisional results of the 1991 national census of population, information is not available on a comprehensive basis for earlier years at individual authority level.

Estimated percentage of the local three- and four-year-old population attending maintained nursery schools in each education authority in the Greater London region.
January 1992

	Participation rates
Camden	5
Greenwich	10
Hackney	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	16
Islington	6
Kensington and Chelsea	9
Lambeth	6
Lewisham	3
Southwark	7
Tower Hamlets	11
Wandsworth	3
Westminster[1]	5
Barking	n/a
Barnet	6
Bexley	3
Brent	4
Bromley	n/a
Croydon	5
Ealing	8
Enfield	n/a
Haringey	4
Harrow	n/a
Havering	n/a
Hillingdon	2
Hounslow	n/a
Kingston upon Thames	7
Merton	n/a
Newham	12
Redbridge	n/a
Richmond upon Thames	2
Sutton	5
Waltham Forest	5
Greater London	5

[1] Includes City ILEA.
n/a = not applicable.

WALES

Badger Setts

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer of 31 March, *Official Report*, column *270*, what advice has been obtained before granting a licence to allow dogs to be entered into a badger sett; what criteria have been applied to determine whether, when and to whom such a licence should be granted; what measures have been taken to ensure that the minimum harm possible is suffered by dog and badger; and what are the conditions attached to the granting of any such licence.

Mr. David Hunt: Any licence application to permit the entry of dogs into badger setts would be judged on its merits, taking account of advice from wildlife experts from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service following a site visit. Conditions attached to a particular licence will reflect the circumstances of the case.

Local Government, Gower

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit West Cross in the Gower constituency to discuss factors affecting local government matters.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no present plans to do so.

Employment Projects

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 May, *Official Report*, column *24*, if he will specify the number of projects in each county corresponding to the jobs *(a)* created, *(b)* safeguarded and *(c)* the capital expenditure as arising from inward investment in 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: The county by county breakdown of inward investment projects recorded for Wales during 1992-93 is shown in the following table. The figures are based on information provided by the companies at the time the projects were recorded and have not been amended to take account of any subsequent development.

County	*Number of projects*
Clwyd	40
Dyfed	13
Gwent	42

County	*Number of projects*
Gwynedd	22
Powys	22
Mid Glamorgan	30
South Glamorgan	21
West Glamorgan	11
Total	201

Health Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to fund-holding general practitioners in respect of payment for patients referred to treatment centres for ophthalmic, general or orthopaedic surgery.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Under the guidance on treatment centres sent to all general practitioners and general practitioner fund holders, fund holders are eligible for a share of the centrally allocated places available to their district health authority. The cost of treatment for these places is funded centrally by the Welsh Office and there is no charge to general practitioner fund holders. In addition, health authorities and fund holders are free to make contracts with the centres for treatments over and above those funded by the Welsh Office.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Local Tax Offices

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the closure of the Inland Revenue offices in Sittingbourne, Kent; what will be the cost of providing the service elsewhere, including location costs; and what is the financial saving on a year to year basis.

Mr. Dorrell: Ten representations expressing concern at the planned closure of the tax office in Sittingbourne, Kent have been received. The costs of providing the service elsewhere and the financial savings cannot be separately identified since the closure of the Sittingbourne office is a part of a larger reorganisation involving offices in Maidstone, Kent.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many local tax offices have been closed, or are planned to be closed, in 1992-93 and 1993-94, or any convenient period for which he has information; and what are the estimated savings arising nationally.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue is engaged in a long-term programme to restructure its 766 local offices in order to improve taxpayer services, operational effectiveness, and cost efficiency. By March 1994, 15 reorganisation schemes involving 71 existing offices will have taken place. Of these, 61 offices will cease to exist in their present form. The work carried out in those offices together with part of the work in 10 other offices will have been transferred to 31 newly created Revenue offices. Savings arising from the rationalisation of local office accommodation in these 15 schemes are expected to be of the order of £1·25 million a year in 1993-94 prices.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the Inland Revenue takes into account the provisions of the citizens charter when contemplating the closure of local tax offices, with particular regard to the question of customer access for advice and help from officials.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue is fully committed to achieving further improvements in taxpayer service, operational effectiveness and in cost efficiency. In locations where tax offices may be closed, the Department is investigating alternative ways of meeting taxpayers' needs. These objectives are in line with those of the citizens charter.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what process of consultation is followed when the Inland Revenue plan the closure of a local tax office; and what account is taken of representations from accountants, local companies and individual taxpayers.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue has begun a long-term programme to restructure its local offices in order to improve taxpayer service, operational effectiveness, and cost efficiency. The results of major surveys to establish taxpayer and employer needs are informing this programme. Representations from accountants, companies, and taxpayers are considered, but it is not normally possible to carry out detailed advance consultation. Discussions with staff take place on the implications for them of a closure, and the arrangements necessary.

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of the Inland Revenue in respect of providing local offices at which taxpayers may have their affairs dealt with and may raise queries personally with the official dealing with their case.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue has begun a long-term programme to restructure its local offices in order to improve taxpayer service, operational effectiveness and cost efficiency. The results of major surveys to establish taxpayer and employer needs are informing this programme. In some locations offices may be closed but where that happens the Department is investigating alternative ways of meeting taxpayers' needs.

Industrial Building Allowance Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the total tax receipts forgone in each enterprise zone arising from industrial building allowance trusts that have been approved.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information is not available.

Tax Deduction Certificates

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *248*, if he will list those representations received last year concerning the free provision of tax deduction certificates by banks.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not our practice to publish representations of this nature, but the number we have received is quite small.

VAT (Education)

Ms Eagle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what forecast he has made of the revenue which would be raised by introducing a definition of education in schedule 6 to the Value Added Tax Act 1983 that excluded *(a)* music, *(b)* flower arranging and *(c)* domestic science, taught at adult education classes throughout the United Kingdom, from exemption;

(2) what revenue he would expect to raise by applying a definition of "education" in schedule 6 to the Value Added Tax Act 1983 that excluded adult residential colleges from exemption.

Sir John Cope: No estimates have been made of the likely revenue effects.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has given to Customs and Excise in defining the terms and the scope of their investigations into the interpretation of the 6th VAT directive (77/388/EEC) with respect to education.

Sir John Cope: None. Customs and Excise is undertaking an internal review of the VAT exemptions available for educational services provided by fee-paying schools, universities and other businesses to see whether, within the constraints of EC agreements there is scope for simplification and rationalisation, and will report their conclusions to Ministers in due course.

Inheritance Tax Exemptions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *380-81*, when the computerised register of objects granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax will be available for inspection.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue has now completed the computerisation of the register of conditionally exempt works of art (often known as the "V&A list"). The new computerised register includes a search and retrieval facility which will enable an inquirer to identify, more easily, objects of particular interest and obtain a detailed printout.

From today the computerised register can be consulted at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh), National Museum of Wales (Cardiff) and Ulster Museum (Belfast). Copies of the register in computer-readable format may also be purchased from the capital taxes office of the Inland Revenue for £10.

The computerisation of this register and the other measures which I announced last year will make it easier for the public to enjoy the benefits of conditionally exempt property which Parliament intended.

Charities

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on charities of the changes to the rate of advanced corporation tax announced in the Budget.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 May 1993]:* It is estimated that the tax credits payable to charities on dividends paid by United Kingdom companies will eventually be reduced by about £50 million a year. Under the Budget proposals for transitional payments to charities to ease the change to the new rate of tax credit, the cost will rise progressively to this level over the period 1993-94 to 1998-99. In 1993-94 the cost to charities is expected to be about £5 million, on the assumption that about half of tax credits are claimed in the same year in which the dividend is paid. Details of the forecast transitional payments are given in paragraph 5.10 of the 1993-94 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Meat Processing

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to legislate to ensure that meat processing companies have to label meat according to where the meat originated, rather than where it was transformed into other products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We have no plans to do so.

Rules on food labelling are harmonised at European Community level and already specifically require the place of origin to be given on food if its omission could mislead the consumer. Where a United Kingdom name is applied to imported products, then the place of origin is required to be given unless the product has undergone processing or treatment in the United Kingdom resulting in a substantial change. I consider that the present rules, together with the Government's initiatives to encourage retailers to provide this information where appropriate, provide sufficient information to enable consumers to make informed choices about the foods they buy.

Chernobyl

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to help farmers still affected by the radioactive fall-out from the Chernobyl explosion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Help to farmers who are still subject to post-Chernobyl sheep restrictions centres on "mark and release" arrangements, which enable essential controls to be applied with minimal disruption to normal farming practices, and compensation payments which mitigate any adverse economic effects.

In addition, we continue to pursue our scientific monitoring and research efforts which are designed to identify areas for early derestriction and to enable potential technical remedies to be evaluated.

IACS Forms

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the deadlines set for the return of completed integrated administration and control system forms in *(a)* Greece, *(b)* Luxembourg, *(c)* Italy and *(d)* for livestock farmers in Ireland.

Mr. Curry: The deadline for IACS applications is 15 May in Greece, Luxembourg and Italy. The deadline is 14 May in Ireland, but farmers with permanent pasture only may submit the IACS application with their first livestock aid application after 14 May but not later than 1 July.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received advocating an extension to the deadline for submitting completed integrated administration and control system forms.

Mr. Curry: We have received a significant number of representations pressing for an extension of the 15 May deadline. As we have previously made clear, however, the Commission have no proposals for an amendment to the EC Council regulation which lays down this date.

Comfrey

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the action group for the relief of pain and distress was consulted specifically about the toxicity of comfrey prior to the announcement of the decision to ban the sale of comfrey products.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) announced in March 1991 a full review of the safety and use of certain herbal substances, including comfrey. These substances had been removed from sale as medicines, for safety reasons, but could still be purchased as foods. A number of representations have been made in the years since that review was publicly announced. Comfrey was the first of these substances reviewed and the COT advice, together with that of the Food Advisory Committee, formed the basis for the action taken. That advice was unequivocal and there was no subsequent consultation prior to my announcement of 2 March 1993 of the voluntary withdrawal of certain comfrey products.

Sea Defences, Beesands

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of the 50,000 tonnes of granite boulders which were brought in from Sweden and France as part of the sea defence scheme at Beesands, South Hams, Devon; and if the contract for the boulders was made available to British companies.

Mr. Curry: The supply, delivery and placement of granite boulders was part of a larger contract awarded by the National Rivers Authority for the construction of the Beesands sea defences. Because of the narrow lanes in the area concerned, it was a condition of the contract that most of the rock should be delivered by sea. Eight British companies submitted tenders to the National Rivers Authority, including Costains Civil Engineering Ltd., who were awarded the contract. As yet itemised final accounts are not available to the Ministry but the estimated cost of supplying, delivering and placing the boulders is £0·8 million out of a total scheme cost of some £1·8 million.

Farmers' Earnings

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he measures the cash earnings of farmers.

Mr. Curry: Farmers' earnings may include income from both the farm business and other sources. Income from the farm is measured from sample surveys of the farm business and these also provide some information on non-farm incomes. Latest results from these surveys and the various definitions employed are published in Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1991-92.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

News Reporting (Restrictions)

13. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to review the laws which impose restrictions on news reporting.

Mr. Key: I am not aware of any statutory restrictions on news reporting which do not bear equally on other forms of publication. Editors and journalists are subject to the law in the same way as any other individual.

Listed Buildings

14. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the operation of listed building procedures.

Mr. Key: These procedures are under continuous review.

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about the care of listed historic buildings.

Mr. Brooke: This is primarily a matter for their owners. Local authorities have powers to take action where a building's preservation is in danger.

Cricket

15. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what support has been given to women's cricket through the Sports Council.

Mr. Key: The Sports Council of Great Britain's grant aid to the Women's Cricket Association in 1992-93 was a total of £45,000. The Sports Council has also worked closely with the association to help it improve its future programmes and policies.

18. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to promote cricket in schools and adequate provision for the funding of such a programme.

Mr. Brooke: The Sports Council is providing £130,000 per year for 1992-93 and 1993-94 to enable the National Cricket Association to employ 10 part-time regional cricket development officers, one of whose tasks is to promote links between schools and local cricket clubs. The council also gives £16,000 a year to the English Schools Cricket Association. In addition, three awards totalling £117,000 have already been made by our new Sportsmatch scheme to projects which will benefit youth cricket.

Responsibility for national curriculum physical education rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education.

Tourism

17. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to encourage local initiatives to increase tourism in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Government, through the English tourist board, has supported many local tourism initiatives in recent years, such as the one currently under way in my

hon. Friend's constituency. The recent review of Government tourism policy concluded that domestic tourism funding should increasingly be targeted on specific local areas.

BBC Enterprises

19. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the status and powers of BBC Enterprises.

Mr. Brooke: BBC Enterprises Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the BBC, which has holdings in a number of other limited companies.

Water-based Recreation (Safety)

20. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet the Association of District Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss their role in the promotion and discussion of safety issues in connection with water-based recreation.

Mr. Brooke: I am happy to consider any any request for such a meting.

Visitor Bed Nights

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the latest figures on visitor bed nights in *(a)* England and *(b)* Dorset.

Mr. Key: The latest available figures for visitor nights in Dorset and in England are from 1991:

	million
England	449·3
Dorset	18·8

1991 was a generally disappointing year for the domestic tourism industry, largely because of exceptional factors such as the Gulf war. Full figures for 1992 are not yet available, but it is already clear that there was a significant recovery in the numbers of visitors, particularly those from overseas.

Windsor Castle

22. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money has been raised from the public towards the restoration of Windsor castle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that there is currently £25,000 in the independent trust fund established by Coutts and Company, Bankers.

Hall I'th Wood Museum, Bolton

23. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to visit Hall I'th Wood museum, Bolton, to discuss the promotion of museums dealing with the nation's industrial heritage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I have no plans to visit Hall I'th Wood museum, though I am aware of its importance as part of our heritage; 1993 is Industrial Heritage Year, and I am aware that many museums in the region with important collections will be participating in the associated promotional activities.

Creche Facilities (London)

24. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what survey he has carried out of the extent of creche facilities at the major London tourist attractions.

Mr. Key: I have carried out no such survey.

Goidelic and Brythonic Languages

25. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to encourage the continuing use of place names that have their origins in the Goidelic and Brythonic families of languages.

Mr. Key: None; this is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Media Ownership

26. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his policy towards cross-ownership of the media.

Mr. Brooke: To keep under review the ownership arrangements made under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

English Heritage (London)

27. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response his Department has made to the plans of English Heritage for London.

Mr. Brooke: I refer to the reply that I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 23 April at columns *228-29*.

Press Regulation

28. **Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he plans to make a further announcement on his policy in respect of the law on privacy of controls on the press; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his policy on the future of the regulation of the press.

Mr. Key: The Government will set out their views on press self-regulation in their response to the report of the National Heritage Select Committee on Privacy and Media Intrusion. The opportunity will be taken to report progress on those recommendations of Sir David Calcutt relating to the protection of privacy which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State indicated in his statement to the House on 14 January that the Government accepted.

Treasure Trove

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what legislation he is proposing in relation to treasure trove.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend met the promoters of a proposed private Member's Bill earlier this year and indicated that in his view further consultations are needed, both within Government and beyond, before acceptable proposals for the reform of treasure trove legislation can be formulated. We have offered to assist with these consultations as soon as resources permit.

Public Libraries

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for the preservation and improvement of public libraries.

Mr. Key: Following extensive consultation, I have drawn up the terms of reference for a fundamental review to assess the scope and value of public library services currently provided by local authorities in England and Wales; to draw up guidelines and a framework for local choice for what should constitute a "comprehensive and efficient service" provided by a modern public library system; to consider the desirability of any changes in the requirements of the Public Library and Museum Act 1964; and to identify key developments requiring national attention.

St. Ethelburga's Church

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what provision is being made by Her Majesty's Government to assist in the repair and restoration of St. Ethelburga's church, damaged by the Bishopsgate bomb of 24 April, including the restitution of the interior murals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: English Heritage is providing direct practical assistance in assessing the damage and advising the Church authorities on possible options. It is for the latter to make proposals for the treatment of the building and to consider how any work might be financed. The special arrangements made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade with the insurance industry last year to ensure the continued availability of insurance cover against terrorist damage are also relevant to cases of this kind.

DEFENCE

Empty Properties, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much it is costing to provide security surveillance on the empty houses belonging to his Department in the vicinity of Mantle gardens, Barne Barton, Plymouth.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The security surveillance was arranged as a result of competitive tender and costs are commercial-in-confidence.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether the liaison and co-operation between the security service, special branch and the various police forces is working to the maximum efficiency.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am satisfied that these arrangements are working effectively.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to ensure that when warnings are given as to an imminent security threat the maximum information is given to the relevant police area.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am satisfied that the current arrangements for disseminating information of this kind to the police, and within police forces, are working properly.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make sufficient funds available to the City of London police to establish road blocks as and when required;

(2) what plans he has to increase funding of anti-terrorism operations *(a)* in general and *(b)* by the City of London police.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is for the police authority to determine the level of funding for its police force. This then attracts specific grant of 51 per cent. from my Department in the normal way. Chief officers decide how to allocate the resources which are available to them. Whether and when road checks should be mounted under the powers available to the police is an operational decision for the chief officer.

At a recent meeting with the Lord Mayor and the commissioner of the City of London police I informed them that I would consider sympathetically any application I received from them for additional police officer posts or for capital spending on closed-circuit television in the city.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Royal Commission on criminal justice to report.

Mr. Jack: We understand that the commission hopes to publish its report before the end of June.

Terrorism

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for the future publication of statistics on the prevention of terrorism legislation in Great Britain.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department will continue to publish annually statistics on the operation of Prevention of Terrorism legislation in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The most recent publication, on 25 February 1993, included information for the whole of 1992. The next publication, due in February 1994, will contain statistics for the whole of 1993, including information about individual quarters during the year.

Separate publication of quarterly figures will cease immediately. In 1979 the then Home Secretary undertook to publish quarterly bulletins following Lord Shackleton's 1978 review of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts. The picture was then very different: In 1979 more than 850 people were detained in Great Britain and 48 extension orders were made. In 1992 the figures were 160 and 17 respectively. I have, therefore, decided that separate publication of quarterly figures is no longer justified.

No other bulletins on criminal statistics appear so frequently. Apart from the cost of producing the quarterly bulletins, there are sound statistical reasons for not publishing so often. The quarterly figures are unstable and there is considerable variation from quarter to quarter. It is therefore misleading to deduce trends based on the most recent quarter's data alone. Publication of all four quarters' data together, however, helps to put any variations in context. In previous quarterly statistical bulletins, the figures have had to be revised for annual publication, in the light of new information received. By ceasing quarterly publication, the figures will be more reliable on first presentation.

Prisoners (Mental Illness)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons within the prison system in the last year for which figures are available received care in long-term mental facilities within *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years and *(c)* three years of offending.

Mr. Jack: In 1992 the Secretary of State authorised the transfer of 611 mentally disordered prisoners to hospital under sections 47 and 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983 for appropriate medical treatment. The information held centrally does not show what periods of time these prisoners had spent in custody before transfer to hospital, nor how long they remained in hospital after being transferred.

Grants

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each category of grant available from his Department to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* voluntary organisations, *(c)* commercial organisations, *(d)* other organisations and *(e)* individuals in each of the past five years, the current year and projected for the 1994-95 financial year together with, for each year and in each case, (i) the date he published information or issued a circular providing detailed criteria (ii) the date the application form was made generally available (iii) the published closing date for applications (iv) any extended

and final application date applied by his Department (v) the date of announcement of his decisions and (vi) the date in which detailed offers were sent out by his Department.

Mr. Jack: Excluding payments made under contract, financial provision is available in 1993-94 for grants to be made in connection with the following programmes:

Local authorities
Police services
Probation services
Emergency planning
Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966
Safer Cities
Drug prevention
Probation and bail hostels

Voluntary organisations
Safer cities
Crime concern
Diversion from custody
Victims of crime
Immigration appeals assistance
Prisoners abroad
Probation and bail hostels
Marriage guidance
Reduction of racial disadvantage
Drug prevention
Refugees
Women's Royal Voluntary Service
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Support to the voluntary sector including the promotion of voluntary activity and community development
Accident prevention
Information network focus on religious movements
Prison after-care and supervision
Repatriation of Commonwealth citizens
Resettlement of offenders

Commercial organisations
Safer cities

Other organisations
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Police Complaints Authority
Gaming Board
Commission for Racial Equality
Safer cities
Wartime broadcasting
Probation training
Probation and bail hostels
Ethnic minority grants to training and enterprise councils
Reduction of racial disadvantage
Animals research

Individuals
The Data Protection Registrar

Grants have been made in comparable categories over the past five years as well as in connection with:

BBC	
Welsh Fourth Channel Authority	Responsibility transferred to the Department of National Heritage in 1992-93
Broadcasting Complaints Commission	
Broadcasting Standards Council	
Football Licensing Authority	
Equal Opportunities Commission	Responsibility transferred to the Employment Department in 1992-93

BBC	
Warning and monitoring Arson prevention	Up to 1992-93

Budgets for 1994-95 have not yet been settled.

The criteria and information required before grants are approved are made available to applicant organisations in a variety of ways. The detailed information sought is not available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Electoral Fraud

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about how many votes were lost to their lawful recipients through electoral fraud in total in 1992; what percentage of these were due to misuse of proxy votes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about the number of voting offences is not collected centrally.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans the Government have to review the format of the absent voter forms to prevent fraud by misappropriation of proxy votes; and what systems are in place to monitor the number of people claiming proxy votes in elections; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many voters by constituency voted by proxy in each of the last three general elections; and in each case what percentage difference this represented from 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about the number of proxy voters is not collected centrally. Changes to absent voting applications forms are being considered by a working group of electoral registration officers and Home Office officials as part of our post-election review.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase the penalties for electoral fraud where the offence involves the deprivation of the vote to an elector who by reason of age, disability, language difficulties or other reason is particularly vulnerable to such fraud.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Penalties for election offences are set out in the Representation of the People Acts 1983 and 1985. We have no plans for any change.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to investigate possible electoral fraud regarding proxy votes in Brighton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the electoral registration officer in Brighton has investigated a number of complaints relating to proxy voting applications. One case was referred to the police who have decided that there was no evidence of any fraud.

Mr. Leon Patterson

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Greater Manchester police force concerning the death of Leon Patterson in custody in Stockport police station; and if he will make a statement on the action to be taken against the individual officers concerned.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for the chief constable of Greater Manchester.

Identity Cards

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has for *(a)* the cost of and *(b)* the time scale necessary for introducing a national identity card.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* In 1989 it was estimated that the cost (excluding initial capital costs) of issuing identity cards to all British citizens aged 12 or over could be around £350 million; and that the annual running costs of the system would probably be between £50 million and £100 million. The time scale necessary for introducing a card has not been estimated.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions (Payment Methods)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what meetings he has held, and what plans he has for meetings, with representatives of sub-postmasters to discuss his plan to encourage the payment of pensions into bank or building society accounts, rather than at post offices.

Mr. Burt: We have had no meetings with representatives of sub-postmasters but would consider any request for such a meeting.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of people receiving unemployment benefit in each month since May 1991.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the form requested. The total number of people receiving unemployment benefit at quarterly dates from May 1991 to November 1992 is in the table.

Date	*Numbers*
9 May 1991	555,300
8 August 1991	608,400
14 November 1991	626,400
13 February 1992	694,700
14 May 1992	668,700
13 August 1992	642,300
12 November 1992	654,400

Source: Quarterly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants.

Residential Homes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to introduce regulations to extend the period for which residential allowance may remain in payment to people who are absent from residential care and nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: On 2 April we announced that the rules affecting payment of residential allowance (RA) would be changed to extend the period for which the allowance may remain in payment to such people from six days to six weeks, where the person enters hospital, and three weeks for other absences.

The regulations, introducing this change are being laid today.

The main provisions are:

The amending regulations will apply to people who may already have been absent for more than six days and for whom RA has already stopped. For such people RA will be reinstated from the date the amendment comes into force and will continue in payment for a period up to six or three weeks (as appropriate) from that date. The necessary procedure are already in hand to identify such cases.

A resident may be absent for up to six weeks in hospital and/or up to three weeks elsewhere (eg six weeks in hospital and three weeks with relatives) before returning to the home. Different periods in hospital separated by 28 days or less will be treated as being one continuous period.

The new provisions will apply to permanent residents who have left the home temporarily.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the future levels of maternity payments to women earning less than the national insurance threshold.

Miss Widdecombe: Women whose earnings are below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions do not qualify for maternity benefits. Without such a floor on entitlement, benefit payments could exceed earnings. The limit itself is regularly increased, but we have no plans to remove it.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the levels of community care grants as a proportion of total social security expenditure for each year since 1988.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table.

Year	*Expenditure on social security benefits* £ million	*Expenditure on community care grants* £ million	*Expenditure on community care grants as a proportion of benefit expenditure* Per cent.
1988-89	47,332	40	0·08
1989-90	50,100	59	0·12
1990-91	56,236	67	0·12
1991-92	65,336	79	0·12
[1]1992-93	74,135	90	0·12

[1] Estimated outturn.

Source: Social Security Departmental Report—The Government's expenditure plans 1993-94 to 1995-96 (Cm. 2213).

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of letters received from hon. Members he has referred to the chief executive of the Benefits Agency in the last 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe: Between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1993 a total of 14,316 letters were received from hon. Members. Of these, 2,770—19 per cent.—were referred to Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the numbers and percentages of his staff in grades 1 to 5 who have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants and *(e)* have post-graduate qualifications in management.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability Allowances

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for disability working allowance have been successful; how many have been unsuccessful; and how many are pending.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the Library.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will change the criteria by which claimants are eligible for disability working allowance so that take-up of the benefit can be improved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Further measures to encourage take-up were launched in April, including advertisements in the local press, mailings to advisers, and seminars for voluntary organisations. We have no plans to change the eligibility criteria.

Income Support (Under-25s)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what policy considerations underlie the difference in income support for those aged 18 to 25 years and those over 25 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The levels of benefit for those aged 18 to 24 take account of the fact that a large majority of this group do not have the responsibility for running their own household; the lower rates also reflect the lower earnings expectations of this age group generally.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support recipients are aged between 18 and 24 years; and how many receive the reduced £34·80 rate.

Miss Widdecombe: There are 810,000 recipients of income support aged 18 to 24. Of these, 520,000 receive the rate appropriate to a single claimant.

Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1991.

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest ten thousand.
2. The number of recipients at the given rate has been estimated. The actual rate for 1991 does not correspond to the rate mentioned in the question.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which living expenses the income support personal allowance *(a)* of £34·80 and *(b)* for those aged over 25 years is intended to provide.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support rates are intended to cover all normal day to day living expenses. They do not include separate amounts for specific items of expenditure.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support in each Benefits Agency office having customers in Derbyshire, have arrangements for *(a)* direct payment of housing costs, *(b)* attachment of community charge, *(c)* direct repayments to the social fund, *(d)* direct payments to the electricity companies and *(e)* direct payments to British Gas; and what are the total amounts of *(a)* to *(e)* for customers who are residents of Derbyshire.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of Income Support and the Social Fund are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 7 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking how many claimants of Income Support in each Benefits Agency office having customers in Derbyshire, have arrangements for *(a)* direct payment of housing costs, *(b)* attachment of community charge, *(c)* direct re-payments to the Social fund, *(d)* direct payments to the electricity companies and *(e)* direct payments to British Gas; and what are the total counts of *(a)* to *(e)* for customers who are residents of Derbyshire?

The complete range of information is not available except at a disproportionate cost. This is because statistics are not routinely collected to reflect the area of residence of customers with deductions. Statistics will shortly be available giving the numbers of benefit recipients whose mortgage interest is paid directly to their mortgage lender and I will be pleased to write to you further with this information when it is available. Statistics relating to Social Fund are only available on a District Office basis. These statistics show the number of loan applications for which a repayment was made during March 1993 and do not necessarily equate to the number of applicants. All the other figures show the position as at 28 February 1993.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the official report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Appendix
Deduction arrangements in Derbyshire

	Number
Derby (London road)	
Water	575
Rent	445
Gas	769
Electricity	9
Community charge	1,894
TOTAL	3,692
Derby (Becket street)	
Water	410
Rent	210
Gas	626
Electricity	41
Community charge	1,767
TOTAL	3,045
Ilkeston office	
Water	217
Rent	158
Gas	674
Electricity	43
Community charge	1,548

	Number
TOTAL	2,640
Buxton office	
Water	46
Rent	37
Gas	86
Electricity	5
Community charge	208
TOTAL	382
Chesterfield office	
Water	119
Rent	737
Gas	816
Electricity	16
Community charge	969
TOTAL	2,657

Social Fund—repayments from income support

	Number
Central Derbyshire district office	2,572
South Derbyshire district office	1,677
North Derbyshire district office	2,027
Stockport district office	2,286

Boarder Allowances

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from organisations and individuals in support of implementing a boarder premium for homeless families living in temporary accommodation; and what plans he has to meet the London Homelessness Forum.

Mr. Burt: We receive representations on many aspects of social security, including a number about the benefit arrangements for people living in temporary accommodation. I shall be meeting the London Homelessness Forum on 13 May 1993.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many boarder claimants received the eating out allowance in 1988-89; and what was the annual cost.

Miss Widdecombe: No data are available on either cost or the number of boarders who received an additional allowance for meals.

Judicial Review

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been made in the past year for judicial review of social fund decisions, and what percentage were successful.

Mr. Scott: Pursuant to my reply of 14 April 1993 at column *668* the following information was incorrect:

"In 1992-93, five judicial review applications were made. So far, two of these have been heard: neither was successful.

There have been 12·5 million applications for discretionary social fund payments since they became available in 1988: of these, only 25 have resulted in judicial review applications."

The correct information is as follows:

"In 1992-93 six judicial review applications were made. So far, two of these have been heard: neither was successful.

There have been over 12·5 million applications for discretionary social fund payments since they became available in 1988: of these, only 26 have resulted in judicial review applications."

Benefits (Automatic Credit Transfer)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimates have been made about the amount of money which could be saved from the introduction of automatic credit transfer of benefit payments into claimants' bank accounts;

(2) how many persons in receipt of social security benefits do not have a bank account.

Miss Widdecombe: The payment of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 7 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many persons in receipt of social security benefits do not have bank accounts and what estimates have been made about the amount of money which could be saved from the introduction of automated credit transfer of benefit payments into claimants' bank accounts.

A survey undertaken in 1991 estimated that 30 per cent. of Social Security recipients did not have a bank or building society account.

Payment by automated credit transfer (ACT) has been available to many of our customers for several years. In line with a commitment made in the Citizens Charter, ACT is being made available for a wider range of benefits. The savings resulting from this extension will depend how many recipients select ACT as a method of payment. If all social security recipients were paid in this manner, this would lead to administrative savings of around £475m a year.

I hope you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

British Council Initiatives

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives have been taken by the British Council to raise the profile of Northern Ireland abroad.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1986 the British Council, with financial support from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, has operated an annual programme of cultural events, study hours and exhibitions designed to raise the profile of Northern Ireland in the United States. In 1992-93, this was complemented by a similar programme in Europe.

Obscene Items

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of items seized on the grounds of obscenity by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mates: The question of whether an item is obscene is a matter for the courts. Police records indicate that,

during the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993, a total of 690 pornographic tapes were seized by the RUC. Other pornographic items, such as magazines, may have been seized by police at local level but no central record is maintained of such seizures.

Health and Social Services Boards

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been lodged with the Office of Fair Employment and industrial tribunals alleging sex or religious discrimination by each of the area health and social services boards in Northern Ireland; and how many, and for what reason, have not proceeded to a hearing by the tribunal over the last three years.

Mr. Hanley: The requested information is given in the following table:

Applications to OFE/Tribunals from 1 May 1990 to 30 April 1993

	Fair Employment	*Sex Discrimination*	*Total*
Eastern Board			
Number of applications	43	37	80
Gone to tribunal	1	2	3
Pending	20	15	35
Withdrawn	17	9	26
Withdrawn following conciliated settlement	5	11	16
Northern Board			
Number of applications	15	15	30
Gone to tribunal	[1]4	0	4
Pending	6	11	17
Withdrawn	5	4	9
Withdrawn following settlement or at hearing	[1]4	0	[1]4
Southern Board			
Number of applications	19	10	29
Gone to tribunal	7	9	16
Pending	7	9	16
Withdrawn	12	1	13
Withdrawn following conciliated settlement	0	0	0
Western Board			
Number of applications	20	6	26
Gone to tribunal	0	1	1
Pending	6	1	7
Withdrawn	13	0	13
Withdrawn following conciliated settlement	1	4	5

[1] Figures included with numbers "gone to tribunal".

ENVIRONMENT

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for PA Cambridge Economic Consultants to publish an interim report on the costs and benefits of enterprise zones before the publication of its final evaluation exercise report in 1995.

Mr. Robin Squire: An interim report has been commissioned and a final draft is being considered by my Department. No decision on publication has yet been made.

Recycling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish a planning guidance note on the recycling of aggregate materials.

Mr. Baldry: The potential for increasing the use of waste and recycled materials as aggregates is a factor considered in the consultation draft of Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6 ("Guidelines for Provision of Aggregates in England and Wales"). Final guidance should be published in the summer. At present, I have no plans to issue separate guidance on recycling for aggregates.

Acidic Aerosols

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take immediate steps to monitor and control acidic aerosols.

Mr. Maclean: Measurements of aerosol sulphate are made at 10 sites in the United Kingdom. We have no immediate plans to extend this monitoring to acid aerosols.

Public Bodies

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, column *426*, if he will list the public bodies to which he makes appointments and the number of people appointed to each.

Mr. Howard: The bodies, and the number of appointments, are as listed. Sixty-one of these posts are currently unfilled.

Name of body	Number of appointments
A *Advisory*	
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment	20
Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment	25
Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances	11
Black Country Limestone Advisory Panel	6
Building Regulations Advisory Committee	16
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council	14
Property Advisory Group	15
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee	21
Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution	14
B *Executive*	
Audit Commission	17
British Board of Agrement	17
Commission for the New Towns	13
Countryside Commission	11
English Nature	14
Housing Action Trust Liverpool	12
Housing Action Trust North Hull	11
Housing Action Trust Waltham Forest	11
Housing Corporation	15
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	4
Letchworth Garden City Corporation	6
Local Government Commission	15
London Pensions Fund Authority	8
London Residuary Body	4
National Rivers Authority	12
Rural Development Commission	8
United Kingdom Eco-Labelling Board	15
Urban Development Corporation Birmingham Heartlands	13
Urban Development Corporation, Black Country	13
Urban Development Corporation, Bristol	12
Urban Development Corporation, Central Manchester	10
Urban Development Corporation, Leeds	11
Urban Development Corporation, London Docklands	13
Urban Development Corporation, Merseyside	13
Urban Development Corporation, Plymouth	12
Urban Development Corporation, Sheffield	12
Urban Development Corporation, Teesside	12
Urban Development Corporation, Trafford Park	13
Urban Development Corporation, Tyne and Wear	13
C *Proposed Executive NDPBs*	
Housing Action Trust, Birmingham, Castlevale	11
Housing Action Trust, Brent	11
Housing Action Trust, Tower Hamlets	11
D *Nationalised Industry*	
British Waterways Board	7
E *Tribunal*	
Rent Assessment Panels (13)	466

Council Tax

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses/dwellings are there in each council tax band in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency; and how many people in each council tax band qualify for the 25 per cent. single person's discount.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information for Chelmsford parliamentary constituency is not available. However, comparable information for the area of Chelmsford district council is available, as follows:

Council tax band	Number of dwellings	Number of single person discounts
A	3,980	2,430
B	7,890	4,150
C	19,110	5,210
D	14,510	2,770
E	8,660	1,240
F	4,320	490
G	3,230	370
H	250	30
Total	61,960	16,680

Notes:
Totals may not sum owing to rounding. The figures for numbers of dwellings reflect the valuation list sent to Chelmsford district council as at 1 December 1992. Estimates for the number of single person discounts are derived from the number of dwellings shown on the community charge register at 1 December 1992 as containing only one non-student chargepayer on 1 June 1992.

Fanfare for a New World Concert

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the circumstances which led to the staging of the Fanfare for a New World concert in Liverpool in 1992; on what basis a £2 shell company was appointed to oversee the event; what creditors are now seeking satisfaction from the Merseyside development corporation; and what representations he has received about the matter.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Fanfare for a New World concert was an important element in the Grand Regatta Columbus celebrations held in Liverpool last summer. From the earliest stages of planning the grand regatta, it had been recognised that a major flagship event of this kind would help to attract visitors and media attention to the city.

The Merseyside development corporation took the decisions to act as sponsors, rather than organisers, of the concert following approaches made to them by a private sector consortium. This consortium, who had worked for them in various capacities since 1986, included a well-known London-based opera impresario and the organiser of the successful Symphony for A Spire at Salisbury Cathedral. In the light of the proven track record of the members of this consortium, and following a thorough appraisal of the proposed budget, a legal agreement was drawn up which, among other things, set a maximum level of sponsorship for the event. This maximum level was increased shortly before the concert when the corporation was advised that further sponsorship from the private sector had not been secured at the expected level.

I understand that the Merseyside development corporation has received no direct approaches from creditors. Apart from the hon. Member's question, the only representations that my right hon. and learned Friend has received are three further questions tabled by, and a letter from, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle).

Council Tax

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the average number of days it takes his Department to respond to a written request from

an hon. Member or a member of the general public for copies of his Department's explanatory booklets on the council tax; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what performance target he has set for his Department to respond to written requests from hon. Members and members of the general public for copies of his Department's explanatory booklets on the council tax.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 7 May 1993]:* The average number of days it takes my Department's contractor to respond to a written request from an hon. Member or a member of the general public is currently about 10 working days. This period allows for inward and outbound postal transit times.

The performance target for response, be it to an hon. Member or a member of the public, is that a request be fulfilled as quickly as reasonably possible, while seeking value for money.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Old Palace Yard

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when the agreement for use by the House of Commons of Old Palace Yard expires.

Mr. Ray Powell: New accommodation to house the present occupants of 6-7 Old Palace Yard will become available from the end of October 1993 onwards. It is planned that this House will have vacated the building by March 1994.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee whether English Heritage was consulted about the works to be carried out at 7 Old Palace Yard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell: This is no longer a matter for this House. It is now one for the other place.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the numbers and percentages of his staff in grades 1 to 5 who have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants and *(e)* have post-graduate qualifications in management.

Mr. Norris: The information readily available from our manual staff records is as follows:

(a) (b) (c): 67 staff in my Department in grades 1 to 5 have an arts degree, representing 45 per cent. of the total in these grades.

Fifty-six staff in these grades have a science or technical degree, representing 37 per cent. of the total.

(d) Two persons in these grades are qualified accountants —1·3 per cent. of the total.

(e) No staff in these grades have postgraduate qualifications in management.

Motorcycles

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the proposed EC anti-tampering directive on motorbikes on *(a)* the cost of running a motorcycle, *(b)* the price of new bikes and *(c)* the United Kingdom's performance and racing industry;

(2) if his Department will oppose the EC's proposed anti-tampering directive on motorbikes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The EC Commission has not yet presented a proposal for a directive to the Council of Ministers for consideration. It would be premature to take a view on the United Kingdom's approach and to make an assessment of the likely effects of the measure before they do so.

London and South-East

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the total amount of support given by his Department to *(a)* London Transport and *(b)* Network SouthEast for each year from 1982-83 to 1992-93, estimated, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows.

Government grant to London Transport and Network SouthEast:

	London transport		
£ million 1993-94 prices Year	*Capital*	*Current*	*Total*
1982-83[1]	336	216	552
1983-84[1]	276	296	572
1984-85[1]	192	236	428
1985-86	297	187	484
1986-87	333	94	427
1987-88	269	65	334
1988-89	222	28	250
1989-90	291	58	349
1990-91	502	94	596
1991-92	557	130	687
1992-93[2]	664	241	905

[1] Grant paid by GLC.

[2] Excludes DLR. In 1992-93 the Department of the Environment paid grant of £149 million for DLR.

	Network SouthEast		
£ million 1993-94 prices Year	*Capital*	*Current*	*Total*
1987-88	—	—	230
1988-89	—	—	140
1989-90	—	—	86
1990-91	—	—	146
1991-92	165	190	355
1992-93	454	121	575

In addition to investment funded from Government support, both industries can also fund investment from their own resources. The figures for Network SouthEast show Public Service Obligation Grant to Network SouthEast from its creation in 1987-88. Due to accounting changes, no directly comparable figures for capital/current split are available before 1991-92.

Local Authority Buses

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce legislation to require local authorities to dispose of their interests in bus companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I cannot, of course, anticipate what may be in the legislative programme for next session, but we do intend in this Parliament to fulfil our pledge given before the last General Election that we will take action to privatise the remaining local authority bus companies.

Meanwhile, I am encouraged that there have been three sales in the last six months, Merseybus, Strathclyde and Preston Borough Transport, and I know that many other local authorities have expressed a desire to transfer their public transport companies to the private sector.

Local Authority Airports

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce legislation to require local authorities to dispose of their interests in airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government believe that privatisation would bring benefits to local authority airports. It is for the local authorities who own airports to decide whether to dispose of their interests, taking into account the needs of those who live in the areas concerned and the customers who use the airports. In taking those decisions they will be aware that if they wish to see their airports continue to develop, they will need to use internal resources or look to the private sector to fund major expenditure programmes, either through joint ventures or outright sale.

Buses and Trains (Elasticity Figures)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the patronage elasticity of bus mileage.

Mr. Freeman: Available studies suggest that an elasticity of around 0·5 is typical. However, figures will vary widely between areas and according to the form the extra bus mileage takes; it might involve, for example, higher frequencies on existing routes or the introduction of new routes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the bus patronage elasticity of changes in the level and in the rate of growth of car ownership.

Mr. Freeman: Available studies suggest that an aggregate elasticity of around −0·5 is typical. However, relationships in particular areas will differ according to individual circumstances and economic conditions. These overall relationships may not apply to short-term changes in car ownership.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the patronage elasticity of service frequency for buses and for trains.

Mr. Freeman: For buses, available studies suggest a central range of 0·4 to 0·6, but estimates vary from 0·16 to 1·0. Figures will vary widely depending on factors such as the frequency of the current service. Peak period demand is likely to be more responsive to a change in frequency than is off peak demand.

For trains, I understand that British Rail does not normally use a standard service elasticity figure. In forecasting demand, service frequencies are considered along with journey time and other attributes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the price elasticity of bus fares.

Mr. Freeman: Available studies suggest that an elasticity of −0·3 is typical, with a range of perhaps −0·1 to −0·6. Figures will vary depending on factors such as the purpose of the journey, its length, and the extent to which alternative transport is available.

Sunken Container Ships

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has received to date of the locations of sunken container ships that are floating submerged in the world's ocean waterways; what action he has taken to warn United Kingdom shipping companies and their ships masters of their reported whereabouts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has received no information of any such cases. However, masters have an international obligation to report the sighting of a dangerous derelict vessel or any other direct dangers to navigation to all ships in the vicinity and to the appropriate shore authority. Navigation warnings will be issued by the hydrographic office responsible for the area concerned.

HEALTH

St. Helier's NHS Trust

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated in Sutton under the St. Helier's NHS trust since it was set up.

Mr. Sackville: The only information available centrally is shown in the table.

Patients treated by the St. Helier NHS trust 1991-92

	Number
Ordinary admissions	20,986
Day cases	4,643
Out-patients	202,025

National Disability Information Project

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress made with the national disability information project; what applications for resource support have been received from federations of local information providers from the national disability information project fund; and what allocations of resources have been made.

Mr. Yeo: We received 101 applications from federations to become pilot sites. 12 pilot sites were selected, with funding as follows:

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Berkshire	18,400	33,590	36,400
Birmingham	70,850	62,500	64,344
Devon	26,100	38,500	51,000

	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
North East Yorkshire	24,161	59,697	72,873
Gateshead	48,000	62,820	67,380
Gloucestershire	30,301	38,100	37,300
Kent	64,000	53,660	65,000
Manchester	19,931	54,700	70,000
Norfolk	16,565	49,631	62,500
Oldham	37,589	56,119	81,982
Southwark	21,338	49,282	65,450
Walsall	32,963	46,850	48,000

The project is being co-ordinated on the Department's behalf by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI). The PSI report that the pilots have made important developments in the dissemination of information to disabled people. A formal evaluation is being carried out by the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs, who will report to the Department of Health after the project ends in 1994-95.

NHS Security Review

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the report of the recent review into security and crime prevention in the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: We have today placed copies of the full report and executive summary in the Library.

Nurse-to-Bed Ratio

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *381*, how many *(a)* beds and *(b)* nurses were available in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Total numbers of average available beds and nursing and midwifery staff in the NHS—England 1979—1990-91

Years	Average available beds	Nurses and midwives (excl agency) (whole-time equivalent)
1979	361,670	354,420
1980	355,980	365,900
1981	351,500	388,010
1982	348,100	394,040
1983	343,090	394,690
1984	334,510	393,740
1985	325,490	397,030
1986	315,710	397,240
1987-88	297,340	397,910
1988-89	282,900	397,840
1989-90	270,310	398,050
1990-91	255,440	395,360
1991-92	242,360	392,200

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten except for the 1980 nurses and midwives figure which is rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. From 1987 onwards, the daily available beds figure is averaged over the year whereas the nurses and midwives figures are as at September of each year.
3. *Source:* Department of Health 1979—1986 return; 1987-88—1990-91 KH03 return and Department of Health—Non-Medical Manpower Census.

Angiosarcoma of the Liver

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the small area health statistics unit will complete its survey into the geographical incidence of angiosarcoma of the liver in Great Britain in relation to vinyl chloride plants.

Dr. Mawhinney: The small area health statistics unit will complete its vinyl chloride study later this year.

Small Area Health Statistics Unit

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports from the small area health statistics unit have been published other than those relating to cancer.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 8 February at column *74*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual budget for the small area health statistics unit for each year since 1987; what proportion of the annual budget for the small area health statistics unit is provided by her Department; how the remaining budget is provided; and how many small area health statistics unit investigations have resulted in prosecutions against employers.

Dr. Mawhinney: The annual budgets for the small area health statistics unit (SAHSU) since 1987 and the proportions contributed by the sponsoring Departments are shown in the tables.

Contribution

	Per cent.
Department of Health	40
Department of the Environment	33
Health and Safety Executive	10
Scottish Office	10
Welsh Office	5
DHSS (NI)	2

Financial Year	Budget £'000
1987-88	188
1988-89	310
1989-90	350
1990-91	417
1991-92	517
1992-93	538

We are not aware of any SAHSU investigations resulting in prosecutions against employers.

Air Pollution

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has available of mortality rates resulting from air pollution.

Mr. Sackville: None. The recording of mortality statistics in the United Kingdom uses the International Classification of Diseases. This does not specify air pollution as a diagnosis.

Cancer

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has conducted into socio-economic factors in cancers, by cancer type.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not conduct research specifically into socio-economic factors in cancers. The Department's estimated expenditure on research into cancer in the financial year 1992-93 is £4,188,733. Several of the projects being undertaken cover socio-economic factors as part of the wider research.

Infections, Hampshire

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* tuberculosis, *(b)* dysentery and *(c)* viral hepatitis were reported in (i) Southampton and (ii) Hampshire for each year since 1983.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Notified cases of tuberculosis (TB) dysentery/viral hepatitis 1983-1992 for Southampton and Hampshire.

Southampton	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*[1]1992*
TB (all forms)	24	16	26	21	21	22	21	21	27	21
Dysentery (Amoebic and Bacillary)	8	11	3	4	12	37	1	8	5	15
Viral Hepatitis (all forms)	21	13	8	7	20	38	26	15	11	14

Hampshire	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*[1]1992*
TB (all forms)	98	63	92	66	62	79	58	50	60	43
Dysentery (Amoebic and Bacillary)	45	58	30	27	48	68	20	27	28	69
Viral Hepatitis (all forms)	119	69	68	49	86	160	103	78	53	49

[1]1992 data is provisional.

Access to Health Records Act 1990

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to make regulations under sections 8(2), (3) and (10)(1) of the Access to Health Records Act 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: There are no immediate plans to make such regulations. Any complaint that a hospital has not complied with the Act can be dealt with under the existing hospital complaints procedures. In all cases, complaints can be taken direct to the courts. We will, however, continue to keep the need for regulations under review.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the numbers and percentages of her staff in grades one to five who have *(a)* arts degrees, *(b)* science degrees, *(c)* technical degrees, *(d)* who are qualified accountants and *(e)* have post-graduate qualifications in management.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

These figures exclude people seconded into the Department, which includes a number of experienced accountants and national health service managers. We do not collate centrally information on the numbers of staff who have post-graduate qualifications in management, but all members of staff in these grades attend in-house and external management courses, some of which lead to formal qualifications.

The percentages in this table relate to all staff in the grade, not just those with recorded qualifications.

	Arts		*Science*		*Arts and Science*		*Tech*		*Qualified Accountants*	
	No.	*Per cent.*	*No.*	*Per cent.*	*No.*	*Per cent.*	*No.*	*Per cent.*	*No.*	*Per cent.*
UG1	1	50	1	50	—	—	—	—	—	—
UG2	4	80	1	20	—	—	—	—	—	—
UG3	8	38	12	57	—	—	1	50	—	—
UG4	7	26	18	67	2	70	—	—	—	—
UG5	60	27	129	58	12	50	3	10	2	10

Laboratory Technicians

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if laboratory technicians working for national health service hospitals are designated as medical laboratory scientific officers; and if such persons are required to have MLSO training before they can apply for employment in the NHS as laboratory technicians.

Dr. Mawhinney: Medical laboratory scientific officer (MLSO) is a term used to describe staff who perform a certain range of technical, analytical and investigative functions in national health service clinical laboratories. Pay and grading agreements of the NHS professional and technical staffs B Whitley council require staff discharging that range of MLSO functions to meet the qualification and training requirements of and be registered as medical laboratory technicians under the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act (1960).

Cataract Operations, Hull

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now make it her policy to collect information about the current waiting time for cataract operations at the Hull royal infirmary.

Mr. Sackville: No. Information on waiting times for ophthalmology treatment, which includes cataract operations, in district health authorities and national health service trusts is available routinely in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", the latest edition of which is available in the Library.

NHS Land

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the quantity and value of land held by the national health service in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* the latest available date.

Mr. Sackville: The area of land held by the national health service at 31 December 1989 was estimated at 16,719 hectares. The equivalent figure for 1 April 1992 (the latest available) is estimated to be 16,158 hectares.

The total existing use value of NHS land and buildings as at 31 December 1989 was £23,447,056,000. The apportionment between land and building values at 31 December 1989 is not available from centrally held returns. The total existing use value of NHS land and buildings as at 1 April 1992 is estimated at £21,447,463,000, of which £5,755,453,000 may be taken to relate to the landholding.

Qa Business Services

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings she has held, and what plans she has to hold meetings with representatives of former employees of Qa Business Services to discuss their loss of pension rights.

Mr. Sackville: None. I have offered to meet the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) and other hon. Members to hear representations on behalf of constituents affected by the collapse of Qa Business Services.

Purchasing Development

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who she intends to consult when considering the establishment of the national purchaser development team.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are undertaking a series of meetings with all regional health authorities and the chairmen of district health authorities and family health services authorities to discuss progress on purchasing. We will consider what further action might be needed to support the development of purchasing in the light of these discussions.

Elderly Patients

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring of the work of general practitioners in respect of their care of over-75-year-old patients is being undertaken; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Family health services authorities are responsible for monitoring of general practitioners locally, in respect of all services provided by GPs.

In addition, the Department of Health has commissioned research from the centre for primary care research (CPCR) in Manchester into the operation of the 75+ health check.

The Department also commissioned a survey from MORI into patients' reactions to the new GP contract. The MORI survey (conducted in 1991) found that almost four out of five of those 75+ patients offered a check-up took advantage of it and nine out of 10 of those who had a check-up found it useful.

AIDS

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total Government expenditure on HIV/AIDS medical research; and if she will provide an estimate of total expenditure from all sources on HIV/AIDS medical reseach.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 26 April 1993, c. 280]:* The cumulative total of Government funding for AIDS medical research for the financial years 1986-87 to 1992-93 is £66,170,000. This represents the sum made available to the Medical Research Council (MRC) for a directed programme of AIDS research covering vaccine development and to improve our understanding of the natural history of the virus.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 May 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Bailiffs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to impose restrictions on the current powers granted to bailiffs to sell off stock cheaply in order to meet debts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is presently reviewing the organisation and management of those empowered to remove and sell goods to meet the payment of debts. A consultation paper was issued on 4 August 1992, which canvassed, inter alia, whether changes are necessary to the law governing the sale of goods seized in payment of debt. Following the consultation, officials are preparing advice on the subject for the Lord Chancellor to consider.

Small Claims Courts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he is giving to altering the upper limit of claims in the small claims court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: We are keeping the small claims limit under review and plan to raise it as soon as practicable. However, we have not at this stage finalised the level to which it will be raised, nor the date on which this will take place.

The level was last increased to £1,000 in 1991. Any further increase may capture cases of greater complexity than those for which the procedure was designed. We are concerned to have appropriate procedures in place to deal with such cases before raising the small claims limit further.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Education Staff

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 March to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), *Official Report*, column *113*, what further consideration he has given to the consequences for the tendering out of the prison education service of the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Greenway, dated 8 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what further consideration has been given to the consequences for the competitive tendering of prison education of the Acquired Rights Directive.

At those establishments where final decisions have not already been taken about who is to be the future provider of education services, the Prison Service will invite all the tenderers originally invited to bid to submit further bids on the basis that the European Community Acquired Rights Directive and the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply. This is without prejudice to whether or not an appeal is lodged against the High Court judgment in the case of Kenny and Woodroff *v.* South Manchester College.

European Parliament Elections

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, columns *181-82*, if he expects that EC nationals resident in the United Kingdom will generally have the right to vote in the 1994 European Parliament elections.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes.

Hosni E. Farhat

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has regarding the resignation or early retirement of any of the police officers involved in the conviction of Hosni E. Farhat.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. This is a matter for the chief constable of Hampshire constabulary.

Immigration (Police Questioning)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were stopped and questioned by the Metropolitan police for immigration matters during the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: This information is not available.

Violence (Mobile Telephones)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police forces which are experimenting with the use of mobile telephones to deter domestic and racial violence; when the trial in West Yorkshire is to be evaluated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not collected centrally, but those conducting experiments with mobile phones and alarms include: Leicester, Bradford, Islington and Wandsworth safer cities projects and the Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and the Metropolitan police forces.

The experiment in Leeds was evaluated internally in October 1992 and has now been extended across the West Yorkshire force.

Police Manpower

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the level of police personnel in 1963 and 1993, in the United Kingdom, the west midlands and Solihull including the level of civilian posts; how many uniformed police were on the beat; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1963 there were 80,251 police officers and 13,579 civilian staff in England and Wales. Information for 1963 in respect of the West Midlands and Solihull is not available.

Current figures are given in the table. As data on deployment are collected annually, the figures are for December 1992.

	England and Wales	*West Midlands Police*	[1] *Solihull*
Police strength	128,045	6,952	[2]125
Beat/patrol	53,994	3,496	[3]21-25
Civilian staff	49,162	2,471	22

[1] Figures are for the Solihull Sub-division, provided by the West Midlands Police.
[2] Total number of officers available to the sub-division.
[3] Officers available at any one time for beat and patrol. Number of officers varies depending upon shift arrangements.

Wolds and Lindholme Prisons

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents and disturbances took place between April 1992 and April 1993 at *(a)* HM prison Wolds and *(b)* HM prison Lindholme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Michael Clapham, dated 10 May 1993:

HM PRISONS WOLDS AND LINDHOLME

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of incidents and disturbances which have taken place between April 1992 and April 1993 at (a) HM Prison Wolds and (b) HM Prison Lindholme.

There have been a total of 95 reported incidents at Wolds Remand Prison and 463 at HMP Lindholme in the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993.

During this period, the average daily population of Wolds, a secure modern prison building, was 190. Lindholme, a medium secure prison, (formerly RAF accommodation), with an open prison facility had an average daily population of 644. The figures given include failure to return from home leave, absconding, surrender by a prisoner and recapture of a prisoner. These will be much higher for Lindholme, since Wolds prisoners are remand prisoners who are not granted home leave, and because Wolds does not have an open prison facility.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio of staff to prisoners at *(a)* HM prison Wolds and *(b)* HM prison Lindholme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Michael Clapham, dated 8 May 1993:

HM PRISONS WOLDS AND LINDHOLME

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ratio of staff to prisoners at *(a)* HM Prison Wolds and *(b)* HM Prison Lindholme

The ratio of staff to prisoners at Wolds Remand Prison on 31 March 1993 was 1:1·520. For HM Prison Lindholme the figure for the same day was 1:1·518.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the total number of recorded crimes in 1992, *(b)* the number of crimes committed in each category in England and Wales for each quarter of 1992 and *(c)* the percentage increase that each figure represents over the equivalent quarter in 1991.

Mr. Jack: The required information is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police by offence group
England and Wales 1992

Offence group	*1st quarter*	*2nd quarter*	*3rd quarter*	*4th quarter*	*Total*
			Number of offences		
Violence against the person	45,520	53,408	53,093	49,758	201,779
Sexual offences	7,190	7,396	7,795	7,147	29,528
Robbery	12,007	12,448	13,598	14,841	52,894
Burglary	345,866	312,277	314,756	382,375	1,355,274
Theft and handling stolen goods	701,678	713,588	704,551	724,731	2,844,548
Fraud and forgery	42,425	42,859	42,662	40,654	168,600
Criminal damage	223,759	220,469	212,087	246,195	902,510
Other offences	9,856	9,670	10,264	9,593	39,383
Total	1,388,301	1,372,115	1,358,806	1,475,294	5,594,516
			Percentage change from corresponding period of previous year		
Violence against the person	9	11	2	3	6
Sexual offences	8	−3	−4	1	—
Robbery	25	16	15	13	17
Burglary	16	7	9	13	11
Theft and handling stolen goods	8	2	—	3	3
Fraud and forgery	3	−3	−5	−8	−4
Criminal damage	14	3	8	14	10
Other offences	21	13	15	7	14
Total	11	3	3	7	6

Fire Services

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by each fire service the standard spending assessment for 1993-94.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table sets out the fire and civil defence element of each English fire authority's standard spending assessment for 1993-94. There is no separately identifiable fire and civil defence element of Welsh fire authorities' standard spending assessments.

Fire and civil defence elements of English fire authorities' standard spending assessments for 1993-94

	£ million
Avon	20·473
Bedfordshire	11·073
Berkshire	16·601
Buckinghamshire	12·360
Cambridgeshire	12·039
Cheshire	20·103
Cleveland	19·464
Cornwall	7·181
Cumbria	8·753
Derbyshire	17·067
Devon	19·557
Dorset	12·063
Durham	12·973
East Sussex	14·891
Essex	31·445
Gloucestershire	9·605
Hampshire	31·585
Hereford and Worcester	12·116
Hertfordshire	20·328
Humberside	21·322
Isle of Wight	2·229
Kent	30·998
Lancashire	32·276
Leicestershire	16·924
Lincolnshire	9·583
Norfolk	13·010
Northamptonshire	11·260
Northumberland	5·823
North Yorkshire	12·001
Nottinghamshire	21·087
Oxfordshire	11·284
Shropshire	7·839
Somerset	7·693
Staffordshire	19·345
Suffolk	11·023
Surrey	22·133
Warwickshire	8·993
West Sussex	14·836
Wiltshire	10·054
London	242·568
Greater Manchester	70·787
Merseyside	47·118
South Yorkshire	28·117
Tyne and Wear	34·449
West Midlands	67·514
West Yorkshire	49·002
Isles of Scilly	0·053

River Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to publish an account of progress in the implementation of recommendations made after major disasters as recommended in the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no plans to publish such an account. Efforts are concentrated on disseminating lessons learnt from disasters through incorporation into suitable guidance.

Mr. A. Ali

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters to him of 14 January, 19 February and 6 April with regard to Mr. A. Ali, of 39 Brynton road, sent to him by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend replied to the right hon. Member on 10 May 1993.

Bail

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what mechanism courts enforce conditions attaching to the grant of bail; which body holds the passport of an accused person where this has been required to be surrendered under bail conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The courts have wide discretion over the conditions which they may impose on a defendant to whom they have granted bail. Enforcement of any such conditions will depend upon the nature of the condition, but in the case of conditions requiring the person concerned to report to a police station, enforcement is for the police.

A person who has been granted bail may be arrested by the police without warrant if they have reasonable grounds for believing that he has broken, or is likely to break, bail conditions. Where the court has ordered the surrender of a passport as a condition of bail, the passport is obtained and kept by the police.

Uranium

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what current legislation in the United Kingdom a person can be prosecuted for allegedly trafficking in uranium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I have been asked to reply.

Export of uranium in various forms from the United Kingdom without a licence is prohibited under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992 as amended. Import into the United Kingdom of various forms of uranium from non-EC sources without a licence is prohibited under the Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954 as amended. In addition there are controls in the legislation implementing sanctions resolutions of the United Nations. Full details of the controlled items and exceptions to the controls are given in the respective orders. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise enforce import and export restrictions and prosecute breaches under the provisions of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Any information about possible breaches of the controls should be reported to them.

ENVIRONMENT

Sellafield

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which stacks at BNFL Sellafield are included in emissions authorisations as *(a)* schedule 1 stacks and *(b)* schedule 2 stacks.

Mr. Maclean: The schedule 1 stacks are the B204, B6 Vessel Vent and B230 stacks. The schedule 2 stacks are the B6 Cell Vent, B38 third extension, B355 and B389 stacks.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the emissions from each schedule 1 stack at BNFL Sellafield for each year since records are available.

Mr. Maclean: The emissions for each schedule 1 stack are given in the table. Where there are no entries for particular radionuclides this reflects the fact that there was no potential for these radionuclides to be released from these stacks.

All figures in Mbq.

	Alpha	*Beta*	*Sr90*	*Ru106*	*I129*	*I137*	*Cs137*	*Pu Alpha*	*Pu24*	*Am241 -Cm242*	*R3*	*C14*	*Kr35*
B204													
1988	376	969	25	415	16,233	1,312	52	260	2,154	65		1·3E+06	
1989	263	1,781	35	691	19,131	1,171	70	230	1,464	54		2·7E+06	
1990	193	1,525	28	359	2,395	373	55	134	874	30	5·9E+08	3·7E+06	3·8E+10
1991	159	1,433	32	264	6,099	975	62	127	659	28	6·2E+08	5·5E+06	4·5E+10
1992	113	1,127	17	263	8,721	1,163	34	89	390	19	3·2E+08	2·2E+06	2·7E+10
B6 Vessel Vent													
1988	30	269	11		1,854	18	31	2	20	2	1·8E+08	2·0E+06	3·9E+10
1989	6	48	2		117	2	4	1	8	0	1·8E+08	1·1E+06	5·2E+10
1990													
1991													
1992													
B230													
1988	53	986	24				61	33	229	13			
1989	70	1,709	30				66	38	222	2			
1990	70	1,944	31				78	42	374				
1991	115	1,953	30				70	62	648	35			
1992	56	1,832	24				32	39	282	14			

[1] Discharges from the B6 vessel vent were diverted to B204 from April 1989 onwards, to allow decommissioning work to proceed on the B6 Stacks.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the annual authorised limits for radioactive emissions from *(a)* schedule 1 stacks and *(b)* schedule 2 stacks at BNFL Sellafield.

Mr. Maclean: The annual authorised limits for schedule 1 and schedule 2 stacks at BNFL Sellafield are listed in the table:

Nuclide	*Schedule 1 (gigabecquerels)*	*Schedule 2 (gigabecquerels)*
Alpha	4·3	5
Beta	58	62
Am-241 & Cm-242	0·9	3·5
Cs 137	4	22
C-14	30,000	—
I-129	47	41
I-131	140	64
Kr-85	1×10^9	—
Pu-alpha	3·1	0·19
Pu-241	36·6	7·4
Ru-106	9	60
Sr-90	3·5	5·4
H-3	1.1×10^9	—

Water

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of *(a)* social and economic factors, *(b)* the proportion of the nation's designated bathing waters located and *(c)* recent and projected rises in average water bills in the different regions in determining policy over the funding of implementation of the EC's bathing waters, urban waste waters and shellfish waters directives.

Mr. Maclean: The arrangements for the funding of the water industry under the legislation of 1989 took into account the varying purposes of capital expenditure in different areas. Water charges are controlled under statute by the Director General of Water Services and inter alia allow for the cost of meeting obligations under EC directives.

Landfill Sites (Methane Gas)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an assessment of the current emissions of methyl gas from landfill sites and its implications for global warming.

Mr. Maclean: Only a very rough estimate of methane emissions from landfill sites has been possible in the past because of considerable uncertainties in the basic information used to calculate a national figure. My Department has accordingly commissioned research by the energy technology support unit of DTI. Based on this research, our best estimate for methane emissions from landfill in the United Kingdom is approximately 2 million tonnes per annum, but with a possible range between 0·6 and 5 million tonnes per annum. These estimates will be revised and updated as more information on the factors affecting methane generation from landfill is obtained.

Methane is the second most significant anthropogenic greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide. The Government are

aiming to publish a national programme to meet the United Nations climate change convention commitment to return emissions of all greenhouse gases to their 1980 levels by the year 2000.

National Parks

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now intends to bring forward legislation to provide for all national parks to be administered by independent boards.

Mr. Maclean: Our policy statement on the national parks, published in January 1992, promised legislation to create independent authorities for the eight national parks in England and Wales currently run as county council committees. We fully recognise the importance of this legislation and we intend to bring it forward at the earliest opportunity.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, column 950, which developed countries currently cannot economically make provision for their own recycling of toxic waste.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available. However, during negotiations on the EC waste shipments regulation not all member states welcomed as much as the United Kingdom the provisions relating to national self-sufficiency. The final text therefore enables member states to ban imports for disposal from other member states and EFTA countries unless the state of origin produces such a small quantity of hazardous waste that it would be uneconomic to provide new specialised disposal facilities.

Coastal Protection

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to create a coastal protection and planning unit as recommended by the Environment Select Committee in its second report of 1991-92, (HC 17).

Mr. Maclean: The Government in their response of July 1992 to the report of the Environment Select Committee on coastal zone protection and planning explained that coastal policy in the United Kingdom has, since 1991, been co-ordinated at official level through an interdepartmental group. The secretariat for this group is within the Department of the Environment. It would not be appropriate for the group to take on major executive functions.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review current legislation for coastal zone activities.

Mr. Maclean: The Government in their response of July 1992 to the report of the Environment Select Committee on coastal zone protection and planning undertook to review legislation controlling development below the low water mark; management of activities such as recreation in coastal waters; and the regulation of marine aggregates dredging. The results of these reviews will be available later this year.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a national coastal strategy and for consolidating legislation and regulations to give effect to coastal zone management.

Mr. Maclean: The Government in their response of July 1992 to the report of the Environment Select Committee on coastal zone protection and planning stated its commitment to further the management of the coastal zone within a clear framework of national policy. Recent initiatives include planning guidance for the coast, support for heritage coasts, and a substantial programme of investment to improve the quality of coastal waters. Further work is under way on a national strategy for flood and coastal defence, reviews of the control of development below the low water mark and of marine aggregates extraction, and implementation of the EC habitats directive.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the Environmental Protection Agency to be given responsibility and powers to integrate and monitor coastal activities to ensure prudent coastal management.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have no such plans.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those powers and functions which are under consideration for local authorities' jurisdiction to extend below the low water mark.

Mr. Maclean: The Government stated in their response of July 1992 to the report of the Environment Select Committee on coastal zone protection and planning that they are not persuaded that extension of local authority planning powers is necessarily the most effective approach to the control of development below the low water mark. The Government are currently reviewing controls over development in this area, including construction projects, oil and gas exploitation, marine aggregates extraction and disposal at sea.

Social Services, Greenwich

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the parliamentary under secretaries and the Ministers of State responsible for advising the successive Secretaries of State for the Environment since 1981 on the social service standard spending assessment for Greenwich.

Mr. Robin Squire: Standard spending assessments were introduced for the first time in the financial year 1990-91. The current and previous Parliamentary Under-Secretaries and Ministers of State responsible for advising on these assessments are:

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Mr. Christopher Chope
Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley
Mr. Patrick Nicholls
Rt. Hon. Baroness Blatch
Mr. Robert Key
Mr. Robin Squire

Minister of State

Rt. Hon. Michael Howard
Rt. Hon. John Gummer
Rt. Hon. David Hunt
Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo
Mr. John Redwood

Housing, Solihull

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the criteria used to calculate the land requirement for housing up to the year 2011 in the unitary development plan for Solihull.

Mr. Baldry: The Solihull unitary development plan incorporates a housing land requirement to 2001 as approved in "Strategic Guidance for the West Midlands", Planning Policy Guidance Note 10. Provision for the period beyond 2001 is for the local authority to determine in the light of the inspector's recommendations on its unitary development plan and national policy set down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (Green Belts).

Green Housekeeping

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the reasons why his Department's policy statement on green housekeeping implies that *(a)* some use of hardwoods and *(b)* some use of peat, may continue.

Mr. Maclean: Our policy is to specify only the use of hardwoods which come from sustainably managed sources. We do not in practice envisage making exceptions for such hardwoods, or for peat substitutes. In principle, however, they might need to be allowed for, in some possible circumstances and situations, if there were no practicable alternatives.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the reasons why his Department's policy statement on green housekeeping regards a ceiling of 70 to 75 per cent. as the current practicable limit for the purchase of recycled paper.

Mr. Maclean: Our policy is to keep the use of non-recycled paper to a minimum but some printing processes require its use to operate effectively. The target figure of 70 to 75 per cent. use of recycled paper will be revised as appropriate to take account of developments in printing and paper technologies.

OFWAT

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what, for each of the last two years and for the current year, is the total operational cost of the Office of Water Services.

Mr. Maclean: Details of OFWAT's costs for 1991-92 and its budget for 1992-93 are contained in the director general's "Annual Report 1991", a copy of which is in the Library. The report records that in 1991-92 OFWAT's budget was £6·29 million, and for 1992-93 £7·52 million. £9·7 million has been voted in estimates—class VII, vote 9—to cover the expenditure of OFWAT for 1993-94.

Spending Assessment, Greenwich

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for Health on 4 May, how much more money would be received by Greenwich council from taxpayers through central Government grant if the standard spending assessment for 1993-94 were increased by the figure indicated by the social factor information now available from the 1991 census.

Mr. Robin Squire: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, *Official Report*, 4 May 1993, col *45*, indicated that the percentage increase in the standard spending assessment for personal social services for Greenwich, if information on social factors from the 1991 census information were to be included, would be 9·8 per cent. The equivalent increase for the total standard spending assessment would be 4·7 per cent, amounting to some £9 million. This is also broadly the amount by which the level of revenue support grant would increase. The current review of standard spending assessments will involve a number of further changes and may result in a different outcome for 1994-95 when it is completed later this year.

Environment Week

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what support his Department plans to give to Environment Week, sponsored by the Civic Trust, 22 to 31 May.

Mr. Maclean: BT environment week aims to encourage local initiatives in the voluntary sector. My Department funds a number of organisations which will participate in events during the week. I plan to open an exhibition on 21 May by the Penrith Civic Society, which will run throughout the week and to visit a rural action scheme project on 25 May.

Mobile Homes

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations have taken place between officials of his Department and selected interested organisations in respect of a mobile park home owner's charter; and if he will take steps to ensure that any such charter reflects the interests of residents of mobile park homes as well as site owners.

Mr. Baldry: A charter was issued by the Confederation of Park Homes Industry last December. A copy of the draft charter was also sent by my Department to the chairmen of the Association of Park Home Owners and the National Association of Park Home Residents. My officials will meet both of these organisations later this month. Later they will meet COPHI. My Department has monitored the responses from residents and their associations throughout the consultation exercise and will seek to ensure that all reasonable points are met as far as possible.

British Waterways Board

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to privatise the British Waterways Board; what estimate of asset proceeds he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There are no plans to privatise the British Waterways Board.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present salary and the value of other emoluments expenses and awards, including pension contributions, of the chairs of each of the urban development corporations.

Mr. Robin Squire: The present salaries of the UDC chairmen are as follows:—

UDC	*Salary (£)*
Birmingham Heartlands	25,315
Black Country	25,315
Bristol	18,990
Central Manchester	18,990
Leeds	18,990
London Docklands	37,795
Merseyside	18,990
Plymouth	25,315
Sheffield	18,990
Teesside	25,315
Trafford Park	37,975
Tyne & Wear	18,990

There are no other emoluments, awards, or pension contributions. Chairmen entitled to pensions are required to contribute at the appropriate rate.

Travel and subsistence expenses are payable in accordance with rates agreed by the Department.

Homelessness

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has for the average length of stay per homeless household living in temporary accommodation before being offered permanent housing by the responsible local authority.

Mr. Baldry: The information is not available centrally and my Department has no estimates.

Halons

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to nominate candidates for essential use of halons under the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer for continued production in 1994.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are committed to keeping extra production for "essential uses" to a minimum. In order to be considered for extra production after phaseout, applications must meet a number of strict criteria agreed by parties to the Montreal protocol at their meeting in Copenhagen last year. These criteria include that the use is essential to protect health, safety or critical to the functioning of society; that there are no technically or economically feasible alternatives; and that there is insufficient supply of banked or recycled material available.

The Government have scrutinised all nominations made to them for continued production of halons in 1994 and consider that six uses meet all the criteria at this time. These are:

(i) the use of halon 1211 in civil aircraft cockpits and passenger cabins;
(ii) the use of halon 1301 in the cargo compartments of civil aircraft;
(iii) the use of halon 1301 in civil aircraft engine nacelles;
(iv) the use of halon 1211 on civil airport rescue and fire fighting vehicles;
(v) the use of halon 1301 in the engine compartments of the class 92 and 373 locomotives;
(vi) the use of halon 1301 in various applications in existing installations in the offshore oil and gas industry including control rooms, diver support areas and radio rooms.

We shall be proposing that the parties to the Montreal protocol agree that production should be allowed in 1994 for these six uses. This is likely to involve new production of some 30 tonnes of halons for United Kingdom uses in 1994 compared with a total estimated United Kingdom consumption of some 1,500 tonnes in 1990.

There are a few other uses which might fulfil some but not all of the criteria—because of the efforts of those concerned to bank and recycle halons they do not need new production in 1994. I hope that the efforts of the Halon Users' National Consortium will soon show that sufficient quantities of recycled material are available to meet all continuing needs.

We shall be considering what nominations, if any, we put forward for continued production in 1995 later this year.

Ozone Levels

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest information he has on levels of stratospheric ozone over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Measurements of stratospheric ozone made at Camborne and Lerwick during April 1993 show levels of total column ozone between 8 per cent. and 11 per cent. below the long-term April average. Although the ozone levels reman lower than the long-term average, the April values can be compared with decreases of 10 per cent. to 13 per cent. observed in March and over 20 per cent. seen in February. Individual daily measurements during April were consistently low, but were within the range of previously measured values.

The Department's stratospheric ozone review group will include the latest interpretation of the ozone measurements made during 1992-93 in their next report which is due to be published in the autumn.

Street Lighting

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for increasing the resources available to council authorities for the improvement of street lighting.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have been asked to reply.

It is for local authorities to decide the appropriate level of expenditure on street lighting according to their own priorities. There are no plans to specify particular amounts for this type of expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Consultants

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that the relevant local highway authorities are invited to submit proposals to undertake the work carried out by consultants on the maintenance and management of trunk roads and motorways in a form which can be compared with bids from the private sector.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is our policy in selecting maintenance agents to ensure that we secure maximum value for money in terms of the quality and efficiency of the services provided. In making arrangements for the replacement in due course of existing consultants' commissions we are committed to evaluating the quality

and cost of the services available from local authorities and private sector consultants. The form and timing of this evaluation is still being considered.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will carry out an assessment of the performance of consultants carrying out agency responsibilities for the maintenance and management of trunk roads and motorways in comparison with local authority agents; if he will consult the local authority associations on the basis of the comparison; and if he will publish the results.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All consultants employed by the Department as maintenance agents are subject to performance assessment. My officials have agreed performance indicators with representatives of the local authority associations, which will facilitate comparisons of performance by different agents, and these are now being used on a trial basis to assess the 1992-93 performance of a number of agents throughout the country. Any decision on publication of the results of comparisons will be taken in consultation with the local authority associations when the results are available.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each local highway authority in England the percentage of its total bid for transport supplementary grant for 1993-94 included in its 1992 transport policy and programme which was accepted by the Government for grant.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information is given in the table.

Transport supplementary grant
for local highway authorities in England
Percentage of total bid for transport supplementary grant for 1993-94 made in 1992 TPP submission accepted for grant

	Per cent.
London boroughs	
City of London	51·1
Barking and Dagenham	47·4
Barnet	70·4
Bexley	86·9
Brent	42·3
Bromley	87·2
Camden	58·1
Croydon	82·1
Ealing	56·1
Enfield	58·0
Greenwich	52·7
Hackney	49·4
Hammersmith and Fulham	37·8
Haringey	52·2
Harrow	93·0
Havering	80·1
Hillingdon	81·7
Hounslow	59·9
Islington	40·3
Kensington and Chelsea	75·2
Kingston upon Thames	43·1
Lambeth	29·5
Lewisham	90·1
Merton	69·0
Newham	78·8
Redbridge	54·2
Richmond upon Thames	66·2
Southwark	92·9
Sutton	39·7
Tower Hamlets	70·0
Waltham Forest	74·4
Wandsworth	60·5
Westminster	63·2
Metropolitan Boroughs	
Bolton	61·3
Bury	59·0
Manchester	72·6
Oldham	62·5
Rochdale	70·1
Salford	21·5
Stockport	71·7
Tameside	57·5
Trafford	73·9
Wigan	39·4
Knowsley	95·1
Liverpool	66·0
St. Helens	57·8
Sefton	54·4
Wirral	78·0
Barnsley	76·7
Doncaster	64·8
Rotherham	68·7
Sheffield	85·8
Gateshead	54·7
Newcastle upon Tyne	67·5
North Tyneside	40·9
South Tyneside	69·7
Sunderland	50·7
Birmingham	83·3
Coventry	90·6
Dudley	65·9
Sandwell	40·6
Solihull	88·4
Walsall	90·0
Wolverhampton	76·4
Bradford	56·7
Calderdale	38·8
Kirklees	78·6
Leeds	61·4
Wakefield	58·7
Shire Counties	
Avon	71·6
Bedfordshire	46·9
Berkshire	41·5
Buckinghamshire	65·6
Cambridgeshire	39·7
Cheshire	76·9
Cleveland	79·3
Cornwall	68·6
Cumbria	56·5
Derbyshire	82·1
Devon	52·4
Dorset	58·0
Durham	78·4
East Sussex	43·6
Essex	65·0
Gloucestershire	65·7
Hampshire	82·9
Hereford and Worcester	46·6
Hertfordshire	82·6
Humberside	84·5
Isle of Wight	71·6
Kent	72·9
Lancashire	53·1
Leicestershire	51·0
Lincolnshire	53·8
Norfolk	42·1
Northamptonshire	52·0
Northumberland	81·0
North Yorkshire	76·4
Nottinghamshire	68·9
Oxfordshire	67·5
Shropshire	41·1
Somerset	84·6
Staffordshire	57·7
Suffolk	36·3
Surrey	64·6

	Per cent.
Warwickshire	49·2
West Sussex	58·5
Wiltshire	51·8

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each local highway authority in England the percentage of its bids for 1993-94 made in its 1992 transport policy and programme submission accepted for transport supplementary grant for *(a)* major road schemes, *(b)* minor works on local safety schemes, *(c)* structural maintenance on roads, *(d)* bus priority measures and *(e)* structural maintenance on bridges.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All available information on transport supplementary grant for the categories listed is given in the table. It is not possible to give figures for bus priority measures. Most bids for such schemes under the transport supplementary grant system are included as part of "other minor works". Allocations under that category are not given for specific types of scheme. The answer to the related question on bus priority measures indicates total credit approvals issued to local authorities for that purpose.

Percentage of 1992 TPP bids accepted for transport supplementary grant for 1993-94

Authority	Major road schemes	Minor works on local safety schemes	Structural maintenance on principal roads	Assessment, strengthening and other structural maintenance of bridges
	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
City of London	0·0	48·1	No bid	88·8
Barking and Dagenham	22·7	80·6	80·9	82·3
Barnet	No bid	56·3	70·0	96·3
Bexley	91·6	72·1	68·0	90·0
Brent	0·0	42·4	70·0	62·3
Bromley	94·6	91·8	70·0	69·0
Camden	No bid	51·6	73·7	62·4
Croydon	100·0	58·3	69·9	69·8
Ealing	100·0	54·7	70·0	99·2
Enfield	53·8	90·5	69·9	62·4
Greenwich	0·0	59·5	69·8	87·7
Hackney	100·0	44·9	20·2	90·2
Hammersmith and Fulham	No bid	18·7	70·0	69·2
Haringey	28·5	73·0	89·6	86·3
Harrow	93·3	92·0	No bid	90·0
Havering	No bid	46·5	69·8	84·4
Hillingdon	99·5	41·8	70·8	69·2
Hounslow	84·7	17·4	69·6	87·1
Islington	No bid	20·0	69·5	88·4
Kensington and Chelsea	100·0	57·1	No bid	90·0
Kingston upon Thames	56·5	51·6	60·9	70·2
Lambeth	No bid	50·8	23·7	18·4
Lewisham	100·0	77·5	23·8	61·3
Merton	64·1	84·8	70·0	62·5
Newham	79·9	37·2	70·0	97·9
Redbridge	No bid	51·4	70·1	62·5
Richmond upon Thames	No bid	55·0	51·9	96·6
Southwark	100·0	41·4	No bid	71·4
Sutton	26·3	54·2	43·1	80·0
Tower Hamlets	0·0	13·3	93·5	63·7
Waltham Forest	95·0	39·6	70·3	66·7
Wandsworth	31·1	62·0	50·3	88·1
Westminster	49·3	78·4	70·1	63·5
Bolton	83·4	51·4	88·3	50·8
Bury	0·0	83·6	70·0	95·0
Manchester	71·4	70·5	70·0	87·1
Oldham	76·3	37·2	77·9	80·3
Rochdale	No bid	88·0	63·0	92·3
Salford	0·6	64·7	70·5	93·9
Stockport	100·0	56·4	63·6	91·0
Tameside	58·8	81·3	69·6	62·3
Trafford	81·5	63·1	69·2	96·3
Wigan	25·6	31·3	63·9	76·8
Knowsley	99·3	62·8	90·5	83·2
Liverpool	69·4	32·0	100·0	85·4
St. Helens	56·4	100·0	70·5	76·8
Sefton	0·0	83·5	70·5	77·2
Wirral	100·0	81·4	70·6	90·3
Barnsley	87·9	56·5	70·6	83·0
Doncaster	56·1	56·8	79·3	94·9
Rotherham	76·8	18·5	84·6	77·3
Sheffield	100·0	57·1	83·2	90·7
Gateshead	78·7	62·9	100·0	75·2
Newcastle upon Tyne	91·3	52·0	41·1	68·3
North Tyneside	0·0	11·1	70·0	55·9

Authority	Major road schemes Per cent.	Minor works on local safety schemes Per cent.	Structural maintenance on principal roads Per cent.	Assessment, strengthening and other structural maintenance of bridges Per cent.
South Tyneside	96·5	61·8	70·1	55·4
Sunderland	50·7	31·5	77·2	64·0
Birmingham	90·4	66·3	73·2	70·6
Coventry	97·1	64·2	69·9	85·2
Dudley	70·0	49·2	70·0	50·1
Sandwell	0·0	27·4	69·7	77·2
Solihull	97·4	71·0	75·0	71·9
Walsall	98·0	57·1	70·0	58·2
Wolverhampton	89·2	62·3	70·4	59·4
Bradford	51·9	39·4	70·0	63·0
Calderdale	0·0	65·3	74·4	69·9
Kirklees	95·3	69·9	86·9	62·4
Leeds	68·2	42·9	73·1	89·8
Wakefield	0·0	46·5	66·6	88·8
Avon	77·5	36·7	66·0	87·5
Bedfordshire	10·8	27·8	100·0	94·2
Berkshire	37·7	30·6	64·7	77·7
Buckinghamshire	38·4	88·5	79·8	79·5
Cambridgeshire	19·4	38·0	72·7	69·0
Cheshire	79·1	82·7	70·9	93·0
Cleveland	92·2	55·8	78·1	88·8
Cornwall	75·6	49·0	70·0	75·3
Cumbria	64·6	91·1	70·0	60·9
Derbyshire	100·0	30·0	69·9	83·4
Devon	43·7	60·9	62·1	71·5
Dorset	53·9	54·6	64·8	77·3
Durham	97·6	54·0	55·2	75·0
East Sussex	36·0	68·2	61·8	91·5
Essex	62·3	56·3	71·8	66·7
Gloucestershire	72·3	28·2	74·9	87·2
Hampshire	88·8	65·6	65·4	57·4
Hereford and Worcester	32·7	29·0	70·0	66·4
Hertfordshire	91·8	52·0	70·0	82·1
Humberside	95·5	69·4	73·9	81·7
Isle of Wight	No bid	88·0	80·0	62·3
Kent	84·0	15·7	64·5	77·3
Lancashire	47·7	64·8	67·6	69·4
Leicestershire	57·7	45·3	78·0	73·2
Lincolnshire	38·8	16·1	87·6	76·1
Norfolk	22·6	26·8	65·1	85·1
Northamptonshire	40·6	40·0	68·2	73·6
Northumberland	88·8	61·3	73·7	87·0
North Yorkshire	79·4	54·9	70·0	78·0
Nottinghamshire	71·2	73·7	66·1	72·9
Oxfordshire	100·0	10·1	84·4	85·1
Shropshire	17·2	56·7	70·0	76·8
Somerset	94·1	54·5	66·2	80·6
Staffordshire	54·1	68·5	75·8	87·6
Suffolk	3·8	70·4	64·0	72·4
Surrey	74·5	27·0	54·5	76·0
Warwickshire	29·5	32·2	70·0	71·2
West Sussex	83·1	26·5	61·8	95·9
Wiltshire	46·8	51·7	58·5	86·0

Bus Priority Measures

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each local highway authority in England the bids for 1993-94 made in its 1992 transport policy and programme for grant or credit approval for bus priority measures and the grant or borrowing consent awarded in each of those areas.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is shown in the table. Details of the proportion of their transport supplementary grant allocation that local authorities allocate to bus priority measures are not available.

Bus Priority Measures 1993-94
£ thousands

	TPP bids	Supplementary Credit Approvals allocated
Shire counties		
Avon	2,207	1,525
Bedfordshire	200	0
Berkshire	2,305	200
Cambridgeshire	195	120
Cheshire	650	[1]625
Cleveland	1,875	600
Cumbria	25	0
Derbyshire	123	0
Devon	445	250
Durham	300	50

	TPP bids	Supplementary Credit Approvals allocated
East Sussex	1,100	125
Essex	226	130
Gloucestershire	448	70
Hampshire	300	170
Humberside	130	0
Isle of Wight	50	0
Kent	1,577	500
Lancashire	807	580
Leicestershire	775	0
Norfolk	3,152	3,000
North Yorkshire	20	0
Northamptonshire	250	100
Nottinghamshire	1,634	175
Oxfordshire	675	50
Shropshire	343	50
Staffordshire	100	0
Suffolk	2,438	100
Surrey	1,029	240
West Sussex	1,000	0
Wiltshire	664	140
Total Shires	25,043	8,800
Metropolitan districts		
Barnsley	115	0
Birmingham	500	400
Bolton	100	0
Bradford	1,668	0
Bury	50	40
Coventry	353	250
Doncaster	60	50
Dudley	200	75
Gateshead	773	75
Kirklees	140	0
Knowsley	450	250
Leeds	1,199	450
Liverpool	400	300
Manchester	1,330	750
Newcastle	100	100
Oldham	62	40
Rochdale	15	0
St. Helens	40	0
Salford	125	75
Sheffield	1,675	200
Solihull	50	50
Stockport	130	30
Sunderland	10	0
Tameside	57	0
Trafford	20	10
Wakefield	86	0
Walsall	100	0
Wigan	25	0
Wirral	380	30
Total Districts	10,213	3,175
London boroughs		
Camden	100	50
Ealing	1,294	548
Hammersmith	1,474	600
Haringey	825	75
Hillingdon	777	752
Hounslow	1,192	250
Kensington	175	50
Lambeth	401	124
Lewisham	100	0
Newham	106	106
Richmond	45	45
Sutton	200	0
Tower Hamlets	600	600
Waltham Forest	150	0
Wandsworth	100	100
Total London	7,539	3,300
Totals	42,795	15,275

[1] Part SCA and part Transport Supplementary Grant.
Authorities which did not bid are not listed.

Cycles (Warning Devices)

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the requirements for pedal cycles to carry audible warning devices such as bells; if he will review the present requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Pedal cycles are not required at present to be fitted with audible warning devices such as bells. We are currently considering updating the Pedal Bicycles (Safety) Regulations and the Pedal Cycles (Construction and Use) Regulations with a view to incorporating into them the latest British standard on the construction of pedal cycles. We shall be taking the opportunity at the same time to review the position on the compulsory fitting and use of bells.

London Regional Transport

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to privatise London Regional Transport; what estimate of asset proceeds he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Plans for the privatisation of the London Buses Ltd. subsidiaries are well under way. However, I have no plans at present to privatise the remaining parts of London Regional Transport and have therefore made no estimate of the potential sale proceeds.

River Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken since July 1992 into improving safety and rescue standards on rivers and inland waters; and what methods were used in such research as recommended by the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. Norris: Research carried out since July 1992 includes projects dealing with the safety of control systems on high speed craft, damage and impact stability of high-speed passenger craft, and the applicability of safety assessment techniques to passenger vessels.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to publish an account of progress in the implementation of recommendations made after major disasters recommended in the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. Norris: A summary of progress on the implementation of the Hayes report recommendations will be published next month.

Progress on the recommendations of the Hidden report was described in the answer of my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport on 12 November 1992, column *964*.

I reported progress on the Fennel report on 7 December, column *464*.

Marine Safety Committees

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *102*, if he will list the titles of all the district marine safety committees and their sub-committees that have been established; and if he would further state for each such committee and sub-committee *(a)* its composition, *(b)* its terms of reference and *(c)* the dates on which it has met.

Mr. Norris: I will write to the hon. Member with this information.

Private Aircraft

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what records are kept of flights made by private aircraft from United Kingdom airports and airfields; what requirements exist on pilots to register proposed flight paths and names and numbers of passengers; and in what respects these requirements and records are different for flights going overseas from internal flights.

Mr. Norris: Civil aviation legislation does not formally require official records of flights made by private aircraft to be kept by airports. However, most airports or airfields do maintain logbooks. In addition, under the terms of article 23 of the Air Navigation Order 1989 any member of the flight crew of an aircraft is required to maintain personal flying logbooks, in which they are required to record a variety of information, including the date and the places at which the crew member embarked on and disembarked from the aircraft at the end of each flight.

Under the rules of the air the commander of an aircraft arriving at or departing from an aerodrome in the United Kingdom shall take all reasonable steps to ensure upon landing or prior to departure, as the case may be, that notice of that event is given to the person in charge of the aerodrome, or to the air traffic control unit or aerodrome flight information unit at the aerodrome. This is known as booking-in or out, but names of passengers are not included. He is also required to file a flight plan for air traffic control purposes when the aircraft is expected to fly in controlled airspace under instrument flight rules.

When intending to cross an international flight information region boundary all aircraft pilots are required to file a flight plan and provide information identifying the type of the aircraft, the destination and the number of individuals on board the aircraft. A flight plan is also required if the total weight of the aircraft exceeds 5,700 kg and its intended destination is more than 40 km from the point of departure. This information is required primarily for potential search and rescue purposes and again the names of the passengers are not included.

Twyford Down (Private Detectives)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns *699-700*, what is the total sum of moneys paid to Brays Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd. by his Department since February 1992;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *772*, on how many people papers have been served by Brays Detective Agency in connection with Twyford Down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answers 10 May 1993]:* As at end April, Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) had been paid approximately £35,000. Following my answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *772*, the agency had served papers on an additional three individuals.

A30

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to publish the detailed design and construction timetable for the new separated junction at Kennards house on the A30 near Launceston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* We are making good progress with the initial preparation of this scheme and aim to consult the public on our proposals during the summer.

Progress thereafter will depend on public reaction to our consultation proposals and to the subsequent statutory orders.

Marine Accident Investigation Branch

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances he is able to order an MAIB inquiry under section 33(7) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The Merchant Shipping Act 1988 does not provide any limitation on the functions that may be conferred on the chief inspector of marine accidents, or other inspectors, in addition to the basic functions of investigating casualties to ships, or other incidents involving ships. However, such action would be taken only where it is considered appropriate and after careful consideration had been given to all the prevailing circumstances. Such consideration would include taking into account investigations either planned or in progress by other competent authorities or administrations.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

EC Research Ministers

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the meeting of European research Ministers on 29 April.

Mr. Waldegrave: A policy debate was held on the fourth EC research and development framework programme, on the basis of the Commission's new working document. There was broad agreement on the structure of the framework and on the need to ensure proper dissemination and exploitation of EC research: further discussion will take place on content and financing before the next Council of Ministers on 30 June. Conclusions were also agreed on space, which underlined the need for closer links between the EC and the European Space Agency.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. A. Nadir

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to apply to the Turkish authorities for Mr. A. Nadir to be placed under British jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have an extradition treaty with the Republic of Cyprus, but the writ of the Government does not run in the north of the island.

Immediately after Nadir's abscondment, our High Commissioner in Nicosia met Turkish Cypriot leader Mr. Denktash on 5 May to demand that Nadir be handed over to the British authorities.

On 7 May I summoned the Turkish ambassador to explain the anger felt in this country and ask for Turkish assistance in ensuring Nadir's return.

The Turkish Cypriots should appreciate the damage it could do to their interests if they were to acquire a reputation as a refuge for fugitives from justice.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Projects

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what current United Kingdom Government financial aid projects for Kenya are due for renewal funding during this year; and if a decision will be made on this issue.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Decisions on a number of development projects will be required during the course of the year; these will be reached at the appropriate time taking account of all relevant factors.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the United Kingdom Government have to increase the aid to sub-Saharan Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 10 February, at column *665*.

Narmada Dam, India

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on future funding of the Narmada dam project in India *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* through the World bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government of India asked the World bank to cancel the outstanding balance, some $170 million, of the bank's loan for the Sardar Sarovar dam project in the Narmada valley, India. Various studies agreed between the Government of India and the World bank, initiated prior to the cancellation of the loan and financed with United Kingdom grants, will be completed.

Africa

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the World bank to redesign the operation of its structural adjustment programmes in Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We and other aid donors are involved in a continuing dialogue with World bank staff, both in the board and informally, and with representatives of developing countries, about the approach to be taken to structural adjustment. All parties agree that the essential aim is sustainable, broad-based development. The approach taken continues to evolve in the light of experience.

HEALTH

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider holding centrally information on health authorities which place limitations on extra-contractual referrals.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. The management of the extra-contractual referral process is the responsibility of district health authorities as agreed with regional health authorities. The majority of ECR requests are approved, as the grounds on which an ECR can be refused are very limited and purchasers are expected to respect the referring clinician's judgment. It would not be appropriate to collect this information centrally.

NHS (Equal Opportunities)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will require national health service trusts and health authorities to carry out equal opportunities monitoring of job applications and to publish the results.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service trusts and health authorities are expected to have an equal opportunities policy, together with mechanisms for monitoring its implementation. They are specifically expected, by the end of 1994, to monitor applicants for medical interviews on the basis of race, gender and speciality. They are also expected to monitor the selection and interview processes for nurse managers as part of "Opportunity 2000".

In addition, we have set up a working group on ethnic minority employment in the NHS which will consider, among other issues, advice on good practice in recruitment and selection.

AZT

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many yellow card reports of adverse reactions to AZT have been made by doctors dispensing and prescribing the drug.

Dr. Mawhinney: Eighty-three. A report of a suspected reaction in association with a drug does not necessarily mean that the drug caused the effect reported.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library all the research data and

compiled statistics on adverse reactions and side effects of AZT; if she will list these adverse reactions and side effects; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Research data on the adverse effects of AZT submitted to the Medicines Control Agency in support of the product licence applications is confidential under section 118 of the Medicines Act, 1968. Information on the adverse effects of AZT is available in standard reference books and medical and scientific publications in the public domain. Information is also given in the data sheet for the product, produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

The most serious adverse reactions associated with AZT are disorders affecting the blood including anaemia and neutropenia. Other adverse effects reported include nausea, anorexia, abdominal pain, headache, rash, fever, muscle pain, insomnia and malaise.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the national health service, including the salaries of doctors, the use of other ancillary drug treatments, beds and administration, of the Concorde trials.

Dr. Mawhinney: The costs of the Concorde trial were met by the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will place in the Library the research data which compares mortality rates between those AIDS patients given AZT and those AIDS patients not given AZT; and if she will publish full details of mortality rates for both the AZT group and the placebo control group during the Concorde trials;

(2) what assessment she has made of the development of cancers in the trial subjects who took AZT for the duration of the Concorde trial;

(3) what assessment her Department has made of the numbers and characteristics of patients who *(a)* suffered adverse reactions to AZT during the Concorde trial and *(b)* had to cease taking the drug because of the severity of the adverse reactions.

Dr. Mawhinney: Preliminary results of the Concorde trial involving AZT were published in a letter in the *Lancet* on 3 April. We are still awaiting the full report of the trial which has not yet been analysed by the investigators. As soon as the full report and raw data are received, these will be carefully analysed by the Department and the Medicines Control Agency. Advice on the licensing implications will be sought from the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much time was spent in deliberations by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines to decide whether to license AZT; if she will list the names of members of the particular committee who were to present at specific hearings on the licensing of AZT; and if she will place in the Library the minutes of these meetings.

Dr. Mawhinney: AZT was licensed in 1987 by the Licensing Authority following full consideration by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and its sub-committees. The advice of the CSM has also been sought for subsequent variations to the original licence. The deliberations of the CSM are confidential and records are not kept of how much time the CSM or its sub-committees spend on any particular item on their agendas.

A list of members of the CSM and its sub-committees for 1987 is published in the CSM's annual report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the ongoing studies in Britain using AZT on asymptomatic subjects, and of research studies into AZT conducted since 1988, which have been notified to her Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: Three trials organised by the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, have involved asymptomatic patients using AZT:

Concorde—comparing immediate treatment with AZT to deferred treatment once symptoms have developed.

Delta—comparing AZT monotherapy with combination therapy using AZT and dideoxyinosine (ddI) or dideoxycytidine (ddC) in patients with CD4 counts between 350 and 50 per cumm. A minority of the patients in this trial will be asymptomatic. This trial is ongoing.

Pental—evaluating the early use of AZT in asymptomatic children with HIV infection born to HIV antibody-positive mothers. This trial is ongoing.

All three are international multicentre trials.

There is no requirement to notify the Department centrally of ongoing clinical trials funded from other sources.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions of AZT were issued to asymptomatic individuals in each month since April 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will review the complaint made in 1992 by the film company Meditel to the Medicines Control Agency, relating to advertising claims by the Wellcome Foundation in relation to AZT;

(2) what action was taken by the Medicines Control Agency and her Department in respect of the complaint made by Meditel in 1992 against the Wellcome Foundation; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Medicines Control Agency examined the complaint and reviewed promotional material for AZT at the time. Action was not taken against the Wellcome Foundation. There is no reason to review the complaint now.

Cannabis

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will commission research into the effects, consequences and benefits of the medical use of cannabis as a muscle relaxant and treatment for nausea.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to commission such research.

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a list and description, together with the source, of all the non-pharmaceutical forms of treatment for HIV and AIDS upon which there has been correspondence with her Department since 1987; what encouragement she has given to the testing of non-pharmaceutical regimes in the cases of asymptomatic antibody positive subjects; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available.

The clinical trials supported as part of the Government's commitment to HIV and AIDS research are organised by the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC has convened an AIDS therapeutic trials committee, which includes patient representatives, to formulate a strategy for clinical trials.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much her Department has spent since 1987 on treatments for HIV management, AIDS and AIDS management, manufactured by companies other than the Wellcome Foundation; and if she will list those companies and the products used.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available. The Department allocates money to health authorities to purchase services for people with HIV/AIDS. These allocations cover the costs of prescribing a range of drug treatments, but it is for individual clinicians to determine what treatment is appropriate for each patient.

Vaccines

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the adequacy of levels of supply to the Greater Manchester area of the MMR and meningitis vaccines; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Health is aware that there is presently some shortfall in the availability of measles, mumps and rubella vaccine due to an interruption to supply between 19 April and 7 May, caused by a change from the company which packages the vaccine for distribution in the United Kingdom. The Department wrote to all district immunisation co-ordinators early in April advising them of this interruption and advising that further substantial quantities would become available immediately after 7 May. This vaccine is now being made available to health authorities and any shortfalls will be made good.

There is no shortage of the haemophilus influenzae b (Hib) vaccine; all orders for the vaccine placed this year have been met in full and large stocks are available for requisition.

Suicides

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suicides recorded in England and Wales in the past five years have been attributed to causes related to suffering from low frequency tinnitus and hum; and how many patients are currently receiving therapy for the conditions through the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health has no information on the reasons for individual people's suicides. A diagnosis of tinnitus was recorded against an estimated 500 patient episodes of treatment in the hospital episode system in England during 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available. The ninth edition of the international classification of diseases, on which the 1989-90 data are coded, does not distinguish between low frequency and other varieties of tinnitus.

Children in Care

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have run away while in care in children's homes in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will list the relevant local authorities.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Children in care who had absconded from residential accommodation for more than one week at 31 March 1991

Local authority	*Number of children*
Avon	4
Barnsley	4
Berkshire	5
Birmingham	14
Bolton	1
Bradford	1
Brent	3
Coventry	2
Croydon	1
Devon	2
Doncaster	1
Dorset	1
Dudley*	1
Durham	6
Ealing	1
Essex	8
Greenwich	1
Hackney	1
Hammersmith	1
Hampshire	5
Haringey	1
Hertfordshire	1
Hounslow	3
Islington*	7
Kensington	2
Kent*	2
Knowsley	4
Lambeth	5
Lancashire	5
Leicestershire	1
Lewisham	5
Liverpool	2
Manchester	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Newham	1
Northamptonshire	5
Nottinghamshire	3
Redbridge	2
Salford	4
Shropshire	1
Southwark*	4
St. Helens	1
Sunderland	3
Surrey	1
Tameside	2
Trafford	10
Walsall	2
Wandsworth	2
Westminster	1
Wigan	3
Wiltshire	1
Wolverhampton	2

Local authority	Number of children
Total	152

Note: For authorities not making a return for 1991, data from the most recent return have been quoted. (These authorities have been indicated with an asterisk *.)

Secure Units

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she is undertaking into the provision of secure units by the private sector.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 2 March that she planned to amend regulations to enable the private and voluntary sectors to provide secure accommodation. We propose to issue a consultation document shortly setting out options for taking this work forward.

General Practitioners

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give a breakdown for the most recently available year of the numbers of general practitioners distinguishing between *(a)* female and male and *(b)* part-time and full-time general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

	Full-time	Three-quarter time	Half-time	Job-share	Total
Male	18,694	235	173	134	19,236
Female	5,112	904	395	321	6,732
Total	23,806	1,139	568	455	25,968

Figures refer to general practitioners in England at 1 October 1992.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there were in Greater London in *(a)* October 1978, *(b)* October 1983, *(c)* October 1988 and *(d)* at the latest convenient date.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 1 October 1978 there were 3,509 general medical practitioners in Greater London. The corresponding figures at 1 October 1983, 1 October 1988 and 1 October 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, were 3,659, 3,843 and 3,810.

Eye Tests

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to provide free NHS eye tests to all deaf and hard of hearing people; and if she will make it her policy to subsidise the cost of glasses for this group of people.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no plans to extend the rules of entitlement to free national health service sight tests and to vouchers to cover the costs of glasses to this group.

Nursing and Midwifery

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account she took, in her decision to relocate the English National Board of Nursing and Midwifery from Sheffield to London, of the 1989 review by Peat Marwick McLintock, particularly the recommendations contained in pages 91 and 95; if she will re-examine her decision; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting has not made a decision on relocation from Sheffield to London.

Junior Doctors and Dentists

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the hours of junior hospital doctors and dentists; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Preliminary analysis of regional task force returns indicates that, at 1 April, the number of junior doctors and dentists contracted for more than 83 hours a week had fallen very substantially since September 1990. I hope to announce detailed results shortly.

Mr. Mohammed Saeed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of her Departmental inquiry, into the case of Mohammed Saeed, or the main recommendations thereof.

Mr. Sackville: I shall be writing to the hon. Member shortly about the circumstances of the case in response to his letter of 5 May to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. A copy of my reply will be placed in the Library.

Pharmacies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacies dispensed less than *(a)* 1,000 prescriptions per month and *(b)* 2,000 prescriptions per month in each of the family health services authority areas in England and Wales in the latest period for which figures are available; and how many of these were classified as essential pharmacies.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is shown in the table and was derived from the Chemists Particulars 1991-92 provided by the Prescription Pricing Authority.

Code	FHSAs	Number of pharmacies less than 2,000 per month	Number of pharmacies less than 1,000 per month	Number of essential small pharmacy schemes in 31 March 1992
321	Cleveland	12	2	2
322	Cumbria	30	5	6
323	Durham	19	4	3
324	Northumberland	30	0	3
325	Gateshead	10	1	0
326	Newcastle	14	1	1
327	North Tyneside	13	2	0
328	South Tyneside	8	0	1
329	Sunderland	9	0	0
341	Humberside	33	1	2
342	North Yorkshire	29	1	3
343	Bradford	23	6	3
344	Calderdale	14	1	0
345	Kirklees	17	1	0
346	Leeds	36	5	1
347	Wakefield	5	0	1
361	Derbyshire	41	3	3
362	Leicestershire	69	10	7
363	Lincolnshire	11	1	1
364	Nottinghamshire	44	8	4
365	Barnsley	6	1	0
366	Doncaster	2	0	0
367	Rotherham	10	2	1
368	Sheffield	21	1	0
381	Cambridgeshire	25	2	1
382	Norfolk	19	4	2
383	Suffolk	25	5	7
401	Bedfordshire	18	4	1
402	Hertfordshire	96	19	10
403	Barnet	45	6	1
404	Brent and Harrow	85	17	0
405	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	106	23	0
406	Hillingdon	32	8	2
407	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	139	88	0
421	Essex	72	10	11
422	Barking and Havering	24	4	0
423	Camden and Islington	76	33	0
424	City and East London	66	18	0
425	Enfield and Haringey	47	5	0
426	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	33	5	0
441	East Sussex	43	5	4
442	Kent	54	6	7
443	Greenwich and Bexley	37	6	0
444	Bromley	18	1	0
445	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	79	19	0
461	Surrey	69	8	2
462	West Sussex	27	4	1
463	Croydon	37	5	0
464	Kingston and Richmond	44	7	0
465	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	71	11	0
481	Dorset	28	6	4
482	Hampshire	63	9	0
483	Wiltshire	21	1	2
484	Isle of Wight	6	1	0
501	Berkshire	31	2	0
502	Buckinghamshire	28	3	4
503	Northamptonshire	29	7	3
504	Oxfordshire	33	6	6
521	Avon	52	6	3
522	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	29	7	4
523	Devon	43	8	6
524	Gloucestershire	30	5	3
525	Somerset	18	1	3
541	Hereford and Worcester	29	5	3
542	Shropshire	20	2	1
543	Staffordshire	41	8	3
544	Warwickshire	20	4	3
545	Birmingham	53	4	0
546	Coventry	22	4	0
547	Dudley	6	1	0
548	Sandwell	8	1	1
549	Solihull	9	1	2
551	Walsall	10	0	0
552	Wolverhampton	9	2	0

Code	FHSAs	Number of pharmacies less than 2,000 per month	Number of pharmacies less than 1,000 per month	Number of essential small pharmacy schemes in 31 March 1992
561	Cheshire	35	6	0
562	Liverpool	18	2	0
563	St. Helens and Knowsley	3	0	0
564	Sefton	7	0	0
565	Wirral	16	0	0
581	Lancashire	69	8	5
582	Bolton	5	1	0
583	Bury	6	3	0
584	Manchester	17	3	0
585	Oldham	7	0	1
586	Rochdale	3	0	0
587	Salford	6	0	0
588	Stockport	14	1	0
589	Tameside	10	2	2
591	Trafford	14	0	0
592	Wigan	6	0	0
ENGLAND TOTAL		2,767	499	150

To qualify for payment under the Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme a pharmacy must dispense between 6,000 and 17,200 prescriptions per year and be more than two kilometres from the next pharmacy.

Code	FHSAs	No. of Pharmacies Less than 2,000 per month	No. of Pharmacies Less than 1,000 per month	No. of Essential Small Pharmacy Schemes in 31 March 1992
601	Clwyd	14	4	4
602	Dyfed	29	10	9
603	Gwent	13	1	0
604	Gwynedd	17	4	0
605	Mid Glamorgan	23	0	0
606	Powys	6	1	3
607	South Glamorgan	20	0	1
608	West Glamorgan	23	8	1
WALES TOTAL		145	28	18

To qualify for payment under the Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme a pharmacy must dispense between 6,000 and 17,200 prescriptions per year and be more than two kilometres from the next pharmacy.

Imigran

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount spent by the NHS on prescription of the drug Imigran in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992; and what was the average cost of a single prescription.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on individual national health service prescribed drugs is not provided for reasons of confidentiality.

NHS Salaries

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage the wages of *(a)* nurses and midwives, *(b)* ancillary staff and *(c)* administration and management staff in the national health service were as a portion of total revenue spending for the years 1979 to 1992 inclusive.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 26 April 1993]:* Percentage figures for hospital and community health services in England for the years requested are shown in table 1. Those for 1991-92 are provisional.

While total HCHS salaries and wages costs for 1991-92 increased on 1990-91, they represent a reduced proportion of the total HCHS revenue expenditure incurred by health authorities in that year. Table 2 shows the cost of the staff groups requested as percentages of the total annual HCHS salaries and wages costs. The figures for 1991-92 are provisional.

Table 1

HCHS: Salaries and Wages costs as a proportion of total revenue expenditure—percentage figures

	Nursing and Midwifery staff per cent	Ancillary staff per cent	Administrative and Clerical staff per cent	General and Senior managers per cent	All other staff per cent	Total Salaries and Wages per cent
1979-80	30·92	13·48	9·13	0·00	21·34	74·87
1980-81	33·32	12·47	8·77	0·00	21·59	76·14
1981-82	32·91	12·04	8·69	0·00	21·40	75·03
1982-83	33·19	11·56	8·29	0·00	21·63	74·67
1983-84	32·79	11·26	8·23	0·00	22·08	74·36
1984-85	33·22	10·26	8·32	0·00	22·41	74·20
1985-86	33·41	9·39	7·93	0·11	23·21	74·05
1986-87	33·88	8·30	7·90	0·25	24·16	74·49
1987-88	34·77	7·38	7·85	0·26	24·83	75·09
1988-89	36·92	6·69	7·80	0·24	24·50	76·16
1989-90	36·05	6·26	7·65	1·17	24·42	75·55
1990-91	35·75	5·88	8·07	1·71	24·81	76·22
1991-92	30·72	4·80	7·36	2·04	22·01	66·92

Table 2

HCHS: Analysis of total salaries and wages costs—percentage figures

	Nursing and midwifery staff Per cent.	Ancillary staff Per cent.	Administrative and clerical staff Per cent.	General and senior managers Per cent.	All other staff Per cent.	Total salaries and wages Per cent.
1979-80	41·30	18·01	12·19	0·00	28·50	100·00
1980-81	43·75	16·38	11·51	0·00	28·36	100·00
1981-82	43·86	16·04	11·58	0·00	28·52	100·00
1982-83	44·45	15·48	11·10	0·00	28·96	100·00
1983-84	44·10	15·15	11·07	0·00	29·69	100·00
1984-85	44·76	13·83	11·21	0·00	30·20	100·00
1985-86	45·12	12·68	10·70	0·15	31·35	100·00
1986-87	45·48	11·14	10·61	0·33	32·43	100·00
1987-88	46·30	9·83	10·45	0·35	33·07	100·00
1988-89	48·48	8·79	10·24	0·32	32·17	100·00
1989-90	47·72	8·29	10·13	1·55	32·32	100·00
1990-91	46·90	7·71	10·59	2·24	32·55	100·00
1991-92	45·90	7·17	11·00	3·05	32·88	100·00

Source:

Annual accounts (1982-83 to 1990-91) and financial returns (1991-92) of regional and district health authorities in England and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals. Annual accounts of area health and other predecessor authorities (1979-80 to 1981-82). Annual fiscal returns of the first wave NHS trusts (1991-92).

Notes to the tables

1. HCHS salaries and wages costs cover those incurred within the total expenditure of the health authorities (and the NHS trusts) including the management and provision of hospital, community health, patient transport (ie ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.
2. The figure for total: HCHS revenue expenditure used for 1991-92 is not comparable with earlier years as it shows health authorities primarily as purchasers rather than providers of health care and includes charges for the use of capital assets. The total expenditure of NHS trusts was excluded as this is reflected in the health authorities total expenditure through health care and related services purchased.
3. General and senior managers comprises a separate pay category which was established until 1986. Its adoption throughout the NHS occurred over a period of some years and its numbers include many employees re-classified from other pay groups including senior nursing staff.
4. The figures for "all other staff" included medical, dental, ambulance, maintenance and professional and technical staff together with the total costs of all categories of non-NHS (agency, etc) staff. The figures for some financial years may not add across exactly because of roundings.
5. The tables exclude salaries and wages costs incurred by family health services authorities and special health authorities providing central services to the NHS. However, the figures for administrative and clerical staff for the years prior to 1985-86 cover those staff employed by family practitioners committees whose costs were included with those of area health authorities and were not separately identified.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Citylink (Takeover)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what consideration is being given to the competition implications of the takeover of Citylink by National Express;

(2) if he will refer the takeover of Citylink by National Express to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Director General of Fair Trading is currently making inquiries into this merger. If he considers that it may qualify for investigation under section 64 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, he will advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade accordingly. My right hon. Friend shall decide whether or not to make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission once he has received the Director General's advice.

Textiles

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the South Korean Government concerning import tariffs on British textiles.

Mr. Needham: I expressed the Government's strong concern about proposed increases in import tariffs on textiles when I met Korean Ministers during my recent visit to Korea.

Serb-based Holiday Companies

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Serb-based holiday companies trading in London are being investigated by his Department.

Mr. Needham: There are 36 companies in the United Kingdom which are "persons connected with Serbia and Montenegro" for the purposes of United Kingdom sanctions legislation; one of these is a holiday company. My officials have been in touch with them a number of times to ensure they are aware of the impact United Kingdom sanctions may have on them.

Indonesia

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the current levels of exports to Indonesia; what they have been over the last five years; what are the current levels of imports from Indonesia; and what have they been over the last five years.

Mr. Needham: Information on the topic is regularly published in Business Monitors MM20 and MA20, "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", copies of which are available in the Library.

Pensions and Benefits

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken to assess the effect on sub-post offices of the plans to encourage payment of pensions and benefits through banks and building societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The option to have pensions and child benefit paid into a suitable bank or building society account has been available for a number of years, and will be extended to a range of other benefits in line with the commitment in the citizens charter. My Department considered with Post Office Counters Ltd. last autumn the likely impact that encouragement of this method of payment might have on the sub-office network and concluded that it would not have a significant effect on total business.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of asset proceeds from the privatisation of British Coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department is currently considering the possible option for the privatisation of British Coal. It would be premature to estimate the proceeds of privatisation at this stage.

"The Prospects for Coal"

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to publish his first annual energy report as outlined in "The Prospects for Coal."

Mr. Eggar: The first report will be published as soon as possible after the end of the year.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the energy advisory panel of independent experts as outlined in "The Prospects for Coal" will meet; if he will name the members of the panel and outline the panel's terms of reference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I shall make an announcement in due course.

Terrorism Damage (Reinsurance)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make available details of the arrangements under which the Government will undertake the reinsurance of risks relating to damage caused by terrorism.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Yes. An explanatory summary of the arrangements envisaged, describing the essential features of the agreement to be entered into, was placed in the Library of the House and copies made available in the Vote Office this morning.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Darling: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bids were received in respect of the 14th round of oil and gas licences applications; and of these how many are subject to contracts between the operator and his Department.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* A total of 97 applications were received in respect of blocks offered in the 14th offshore oil and gas licensing round. Licences have been awarded for three of these applications. Work obligations were attached to all of these licences. Other awards under the 14th round are expected to be announced at the end of this month.

Post Office Review

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) whether the continuation of the period of advice by his appointed advisers on the Post Office review into the 1993-94 financial year required the extension or renewal of their contracts;

(2) whether his advisers on the Post Office review were appointed after a process of competitive tendering.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Yes.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning irrecoverable VAT paid by charities for goods and services.

Sir John Cope: There are already a number of VAT reliefs on specific goods and services which are worth some

£150 million a year to charities. The Government believe that the best way to help charities through the tax system is by measures to encourage charitable giving rather than by refunding VAT on general goods and services. The amount individuals and companies donate is a better measure of the worth of charities than what they spend on standard rated goods and services.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has held with charities on the effect of charging VAT on domestic fuel and power on charities.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 7 May 1993]:* I have received a number of representations from charities on this issue and met the Charities Tax Reform Group on 6 May 1993.

British Telecom

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision will be made in the prospectus for the British Telecom share sale for a statement *(a)* as to BT foreign investment strategy and *(b)* on how redundancies will be funded.

Mr. Dorrell: The prospectus for the Government's BT3 share sale will contain all material information about BT's business and its financial position at the time of publication.

Petroleum Revenue Tax

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue from *(a)* corporation tax and *(b)* petroleum revenue tax from oil and gas fields in each year from 1983 to 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Revenues raised from United Kingdom oil and gas production by corporation tax and petroleum revenue tax are as follows:

£ million

Year	[1] *Corporation tax*	*Petroleum revenue tax*
1983-84	877	6,017
1984-85	2,432	7,177
1985-86	2,916	6,375
1986-87	2,676	1,188
1987-88	1,318	2,296
1988-89	1,230	1,371
1989-90	743	1,050
1990-91	971	860
1991-92	647	−216
1992-93	670	54

[1] Before ACT set-off.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of oil fields which were subject to the payment of petroleum revenue tax in each year from 1983 to 1992-93 as compared to the total number of oil fields in production during the same period.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The numbers of oil and gas fields with a liability to petroleum revenue tax and the total number of fields in production since 1984 have been as follows:

	Number of fields with PRT liability	*Number of fields in production*
1984	15	35
1985	16	42
1986	17	49
1987	17	55
1988	15	62
1989	16	72
1990	20	81
1991	20	82
1992	17	94

The information on fields with liabilities is not available for 1983, when 32 fields were in production.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of oil fields that would be subject to the payment of petroleum revenue tax in each year between 1993-94 and 1997-98.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The number of oil and gas fields with a liability to petroleum revenue tax in 1993 is estimated to be approximately 20. Forecasts are not made for future years.

Alcohol

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action has been taken against the individuals discovered abusing the indicative levels for alcohol by trying to commercialise their purchases.

Sir John Cope: During the quarter ending 31 March, there were 230 detections of tobacco and alcohol illegally offered or intended for sale in the United Kingdom. The following action has been taken:

Action	*Number of Cases*
Arrest and charge	11
Reported for prosecution or compounding	116
Seizures of goods only	103

Thirty-four vehicles were also seized. All detections have been included even where the quantities involved were less than the indicative levels, which are only a guide. Separate figures to exclude those cases involving tobacco goods only are not readily available.

Ring-fenced Revenue Accounts

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to treat investment from ring-fenced revenue accounts financed from local resources as outside the remit of the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Portillo: No. By definition the public sector borrowing requirement measures borrowing by the whole of the public sector, including local authorities.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to improve Britain's balance of trade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* The Government can best assist traders by keeping inflation low. Inflation rates this year are the lowest for over 25 years. Interest rates are the lowest in the European Community.

In his Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor further improved the assistance available to exporters from the ECGD by cutting premiums for 1993-94 by 7½ per cent. on 1992-93 levels; increasing cover in high exposure markets by £1,300 million over the next three years; and by relaxing restrictions for export credits on some high growth markets.

PRIME MINISTER

Policy Unit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the committees and review groups on which members of his policy unit currently sit, or have sat since he took office, giving in each case the purpose of the committee or group and the name of the policy unit member.

The Prime Minister: Members of the policy unit attend a wide range of committees as required.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of, and posts held by, members of his policy unit; and if he will give their biographical details.

The Prime Minister: The members of my policy unit are as follows:

Head of Unit
Sarah Hogg

Deputy Head of Unit
Nick True

Damian Green

Dominic Morris

Lucy Neville-Rolfe

David Poole

Katharine Ramsay

Alan Rosling

Jill Rutter

It is not my practice to provide biographical details.

Russia (Nuclear Safety)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss British-Russian co-operation on nuclear safety with President Yeltsin; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to meet with President Yeltsin specifically to discuss nuclear safety issues. However, if the opportunity arises, I will emphasise our concern about nuclear safety in Russia and our wish for continuing co-operation in this area.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the projects, and the funding committed thereto, by the European Community and the United Kingdom to assist Russia; Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan in respect of the storage and disarmament of nuclear material and facilities.

The Prime Minister: The Government have made a commitment to supply Russia with nuclear weapons transport vehicles and special containers to help with the dismantlement of that country's surplus nuclear warheads; the total programme is expected to cost over £30 million. We have no such programmes of assistance for Belarussia, Ukraine or Kazakhstan. The European Community has not committed funding to any of these states for this purpose.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Unitary Taxation

Mr. Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has received from President Clinton to his letter about unitary taxation and the Barclays bank litigation; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* President Clinton and his colleagues have made it clear to us that the United States Administration fully recognise the importance that the Government attach to this issue, the strength of feeling in the United Kingdom and the risk of retaliatory action by the United Kingdom if a satisfactory solution is not forthcoming. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor reinforced these points in recent discussions with Secretary Bentsen and others in the United States Administration. They have assured us that they are very keen to find a solution to this problem that is acceptable.

EDUCATION

Nursery Education

5. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to increase the account taken in standard spending assessments of nursery education.

Mr. Forth: At national level, local authority grant settlements have reflected the general increase over the years in the number of under-fives in school. The under-fives element of each authority's SSA is based on the number of three and four-year-olds resident in the authority. It is for each authority to decide how to allocate resources between its various services, including under-fives education which authorities provide under discretionary powers.

Grant-maintained Schools

14. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children are currently being educated in local education authority or grant-maintained selective schools in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Approximately 105,000 children are currently being educated in local authority grammar schools or grant-maintained grammar schools in England.

School Buildings, Liverpool

15. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assistance he has given to local authorities to meet the cost of refurbishment of the older school buildings in Liverpool.

Mr. Boswell: Capital support for maintained schools in the area of Liverpool local education authority, including voluntary aided and special agreement schools, amounts to over £8 million in 1993-94.

Teaching (European Dimension)

16. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the procedures to be followed in adjusting secondary school teaching to have a more European dimension.

Mr. Boswell: There are no specific procedures. The content of teaching and the organisation of education systems are and will remain the responsibility of the individual member states within the European Community.

Education Quality

17. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he next plans to meet organisations representing parents to discuss improving the quality of education.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend met the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations, which is said to represent the views of some 7·5 million parents, on Monday 26 April. At that meeting, I am pleased to say, the NCPTA confirmed their support in principle for the national curriculum together with its associated testing arrangements. He also met a delegation from Parents' Initiative a few weeks ago and gave a speech at the annual conference of the Campaign for Real Education on April 17. All these occasions allowed him to speak with parents and to seek their views on issues.

Parental Choice

18. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to make parental choice in education easier to exercise.

Mr. Forth: The policy of more open enrolment has increased parental choice by requiring maintained schools to admit up to their physical capacity. All parents now have the right to say which school they prefer their children to attend. The Government are continuing their drive to make more information about schools publicly available. This will enhance choice by helping parents to make wise decisions about their children's education.

Testing

19. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he next plans to meet organisations representing teachers to discuss testing.

Mr. Forth: On the subject of testing, teachers have been invited to make their views known to Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman-designate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, who is conducting a review of the national curriculum and assessment.

21. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received recently on the implementation of testing in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Since the beginning of the year the Department has received around 6,500 letters from teachers, parents, governors and others about testing in schools. In addition, my right hon. Friend has met parents, teachers in staff-rooms, governors and organisations at conferences. He has met national representatives of the teachers' associations on 19 occasions and delegations from all six teacher unions. He has also visited 37 schools since he took office in April 1992.

22. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to overcome problems in the testing of school pupils; and what assessment he has made of the relative effectiveness of United Kingdom testing and methods existing in other countries.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to conduct a wide-ranging review of the manageability of the national curriculum and the associated testing and assessment framework. A great deal of information is already available about testing in other countries, including a recent report from the National Institute for Economic and Social Research which found that the higher standards achieved by pupils in the middle to lower ability range in France, Germany and Japan was attributable to the existence in these countries of long-standing national curricula reinforced by regular assessment and reporting.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to use the power to surcharge under the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to ensure that governors and teachers implement testing in schools.

Mr. Forth: Sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 set out the power to seek restitution from those concerned where public funds have been spent improperly or have not been properly accounted for. Action under these sections falls to the auditor appointed under the Act.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what study he has made of testing of pupils in other countries.

Mr. Forth: A great deal of information is available, from Ofsted and other sources, about testing arrangements in other countries. It shows that tests are well-established in most of our main competitor countries. For example:

—The findings of the HMI report on "Aspects of Primary Education in France" in 1991 indicated that the French National Curriculum has long stressed the importance of basic literacy and numeracy for primary schools and that pupils' attainments in reading, writing and mathematics were assesed at the ages of 8 and 11 entirely through paper and pencil tests;

—a report published earlier this year by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research found that the higher standards achieved by pupils in the middle to lower ability range in France, Germany and Japan were mainly attributable to the existence of long-standing national curricula in these countries, "reinforced through regular assessment and reporting".

Illiteracy

20. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his current estimate of the number of adults in England and Wales who may be defined as functionally illiterate.

Mr. Boswell: The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, which advises the Government, estimates that 4 million adults in England and Wales have real difficulty with everyday tasks involving reading, writing and spelling and that a further 1·5 million have difficulty with numerical skills. Such people are often described as being "functionally illiterate".

National Curriculum

23. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what further plans he has to meet organisations representing teachers to discuss the implementation of the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: None. Teacher associations should make their views known to Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman-designate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, who is conducting a review of the national curriculum and assessment.

28. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he next expects to meet representatives of the Professional Association of Teachers to discuss the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no plans for such a meeting. The Professional Association of Teachers has been invited to make its views known to Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman designate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, who is conducting a review of the national curriculum and assessment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to hold further discussions with parent governors and teachers on the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: All interested parties should make their views known to Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman-designate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, who is conducting a review of the national curriculum and assessment.

Vocational Education

24. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on vocational education.

Mr. Boswell: Vocational education is of key importance to achieving the national education and training targets, and hence ensuring a proficient and competitive work force. From next September the new general national vocational qualifications will be widely available and will provide a third pathway to qualification, alongside NVQs and A-levels. We want GNVQs in at least two subjects to be available in more than 1,500 schools and colleages and one in four 16-year-olds starting GNVQ courses by 1996. In the longer term I hope that around half our 16 and 17-year-olds will take these important new qualifications.

Teachers (Workload)

25. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to reduce the workload of middle-school teachers in the current year.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has frequently placed on record his appreciation of the commitment shown by teachers in implementing the Government's reforms. It is in response to the concern of some teachers that the incremental growth of the national curriculum over several years has led to over-elaboration that my right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to review the curriculum and assessment framework.

English

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions he has had with employers regarding the need for 16-year-olds with a competent command of English.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has had no formal discussions recently, but he has noted the concerns of employers about basic literacy and numeracy standards identified in recent reports by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. He is well aware how important it is to employers—and to our ability to compete as a nation—that school and college leavers joining the work force should be fully competent in their use of the English language.

This Government are determined to ensure that all school pupils learn to communicate effectively in spoken and written English. That is why our proposals to revise the requirements for national curriculum English were announced last month. The aim is to streamline and strengthen the present curriculum by defining clearly the essential skills which English teaching should promote.

The National Curriculum Council is now conducting the statutory consultation on those proposals, which will give all parties the opportunity to offer their views. Copies of the proposals will be sent by the NCC to the CBI and other employers' organisations.

Grant-maintained Schools

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will visit Hendon grant-maintained school to discuss grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has not received an invitation to visit Hendon school. If he receives such an invitation, he would be very happy to consider it.

Disruptive Pupils

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to provide additional resources for schools to enable them to provide for disruptive pupils who may otherwise be expelled.

Mr. Forth: Under the "Reducing Truancy" category of the Government's grants for education support and training scheme for 1993-1994, local education authorities could bid for support to enhance the provision made for their most difficult pupils. A number of the approved projects include such a component.

Teacher Morale

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to improve teacher morale.

Mr. Boswell: The Government recognise the need to maintain teacher morale and are committed to ensuring that teaching is viewed as an attractive profession. Current recruitment is buoyant; vacancies are low; fewer than 1 per cent. leave the profession each year for paid employment outside education. The restructuring of teachers' pay in the coming September will give classroom teachers the prospect of earning up to £30,441 a year.

Teachers (Administration)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to reduce the administrative burden on teachers to enable them to spend more time teaching.

Mr. Boswell: While the Department wishes teachers to use their time effectively, the division of teachers' directed time between teaching and other duties is a matter for determination at school level.

School Hours

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received from *(a)* parent governors and *(b)* teachers regarding the length of the school day or week.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received written representations about the length of the school day from 14 parents, two governors and three teachers in the past 12 months. Letters received from governors and teachers have generally been concerned with the procedures required to change the length of the school day; and letters from parents with the desirability of a longer school day.

Education Reform

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the national curriculum, testing in schools and the workload of teachers.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to conduct a wide-ranging review of the manageability of the national curriculum and the associated testing and assessment framework. The review will consider the need for slimming down the curriculum and for simplifying the testing arrangements. The aim is that early results from the review will inform the testing arrangements in 1994.

Mandatory Awards

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what support will be given in mandatory awards to students in the academic year 1993-94.

Mr. Boswell: We propose the following increases in support for mandatory award holders from England and Wales, subject to parliamentary approval of the regulations to be laid in due course. Taken together with the increased rates of student loans which I announced on Friday 7 May, *Official Report*, col. *254-55*, they will enable the average student support to rise by 2·75 per cent. in the academic year 1993-94, thereby maintaining its value in real terms. We will increase the supplementary allowances payable as part of the mandatory award by 2·75 per cent. We will also adjust the parental and spouse contribution scales so that the assessed contribution from a parent or spouse whose residual income rises in line with average earnings will continue to fall in real terms. The main rates of maintenance grant will be held at 1992-93 levels.

I am placing in the Library details of the rates of grant, the supplementary allowances and the parental and spouse contribution rules.

SCOTLAND

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will describe the financial policies by which non-fund-holding practices obtain or employ *(a)* drugs, medicines and listed appliances, *(b)* goods and services, *(c)* services carried out by a member of the practice such as those listed in schedule 3 to S.I. 1993 No. 488 (S.53), *(d)* employees of members of the practice employed to provide treatment or manage/administer the practice and *(e)* purchase of materials, equipment, or improvement of the premises.

Mr. Stewart: The costs incurred by non-fund-holding practices under these headings are met by the health board either from within their financial allocations or in the case of drugs, medicines and listed appliances by drawing on NHS resources held centrally.

Those services listed in schedule 3 to S.I. No. 488 (S.53) cannot be carried out by a member of a non-fund-holding practice, but instead may be obtained by referral to a provider unit with the costs being met by the health board.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that non-fund-holding practices will be able to offer services in every respect equal to those that become fund-holding practices.

Mr. Stewart: All the patient care services currently included within the scope of the GP fund-holding scheme are also available to non-fund-holding practices. GP fund holders have the flexibility to use their fund to provide these services or purchase them from other providers for the benefit of their patients. The Government's framework for the GP fund-holding scheme seeks to maintain a proper balance between providing GP fund holders with an appropriate degree of flexibility in the use of their fund and preserving the principle of equity of access to health care for all NHS patients. GP fund holders, in providing care themselves or in setting contracts with other providers, will be able to develop improved standards in the quality of care for their patients provided as a consequence they do not directly disadvantage NHS patients from other practices.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the average outturn surplus at the end of the first year of operation of fund-holding practices.

Mr. Stewart: During 1991-92, their first operational year, GP fund holders in Scotland by careful management of their funds achieved average savings, following audit, of

around 4 per cent. A proportion of these savings was returned to the health boards, leaving fund-holder practices with total savings of £190,000. These savings may only be applied in accordance with regulations, and with health board agreement, for the benefit of the fund-holders' patients and do not represent income for the GPs and practices involved.

Nicotine Replacement Patches

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when nicotine replacement patches will be available on NHS prescriptions in Scotland; and for what reasons they are not yet available on prescription through the NHS.

Mr. Stewart: Only one nicotine patch has been prohibited from NHS prescription on the expert advice of the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances. The committee advised that the manufacturer had failed to demonstrate to it that nicotine patches had a significant therapeutic use in general medical practice in helping patients to stop smoking. Other, more recently introduced patches which have yet to be considered by the committee remain prescribable meantime but doctors who do so may have their prescribing challenged by their health board.

Nursing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the reasons for inclusion of paragraph (e) of the schedule to S.I. 1993 No. 637 (S.83); and if he will take account of reasons for dismissal other than redundancy which are no reflection on the suitability of a candidate for membership of the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The power of the Secretary of State to appoint and dismiss members of the board in accordance with the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland Order 1993 (S.I. 1993 No. 637) is an important safeguard in relation to the proper conduct of the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland. The schedule to the order sets out the various circumstances, including dismissal from paid employment other than by reason of redundancy, which disqualifies persons from appointment as members of the board. The Secretary of State does, however, have the power under article 9(3) of the order to waive the disqualification: his exercise of such a power will depend on the facts and circumstances of each individual case.

National Panel of Specialists

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the National Panel of Specialists, and the advisory appointments committee drawn from its membership, will be required to include a proportion of suitably qualified women.

Mr. Stewart: The National Panel of Specialists constituted under the National Health Service (Appointment of Consultants) (Scotland) Regulations 1993 contains a proportion of women consultants which is roughly comparable to the national ratio of female to male consultants in Scotland; the figures are 15·7 per cent. and 16·5 per cent. respectively. All members of the panel must be suitably qualified consultants. The membership of advisory appointments committees appointed by local NHS-employing authorities to consider candidates for consultant appointments in the NHS is also governed by the 1993 regulations. Each committee must include two members of the national panel from the relevant specialty or sub-specialty in which the consultant vacancy has occurred. The appointment of members to individual AACs is a matter for NHS-employing authorities who should ensure that the membership of these committees meets the statutory requirements.

Tenants

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps in the case of any landlords who have collected poll tax from tenants, and who now should collect a lesser sum as council tax, ensure that such tenants are made aware of the reduction they are due.

Mr. Stewart: The Secretary of State has no powers to direct landlords in this way and has no plans to take such powers. There will be very few situations where landlords paid the community charge in respect of a property and where they are now liable to pay council tax. Landlords can decide to recoup the council tax where they are liable, but tenants with assured or short assured tenancies who pay rent weekly are entitled to have details of the council tax element given in their rent book.

Council Tax

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of persons in Scotland he estimates is paying higher levels of council tax than the previous community charge.

Mr. Lang: Using information from the family expenditure survey, it is estimated that about 40 per cent. of households in Scotland face higher bills for council tax in 1993-94 than their combined household community charge bills in 1992-93. This estimate is based on a 0·1 per cent. sample of Scottish households and is therefore subject to sampling error. The estimate takes into account the effects of the community charge reduction scheme in reducing personal community charge bills but makes no allowance for the effect of community charge or council tax benefit.

Maternity Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hospitals in Scotland which had consultant obstetric and/or general practitioner maternity beds in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with the numbers of beds of each type in each hospital in each year.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is shown in the table.

National health service hospitals in Scotland
Average available staffed beds in obstetricsspecialties:
By specialty and hospital
Years ending 31 March 1992 and 31 December 1992

	31 March 1992		*31 December 1992*	
	Specialist obstetrics	*GP obstetrics*	*Specialist obstetrics*	*GP obstetrics*
All hospitals	1,746	178	1,695	162
Aberdeen Maternity Hospital	121	—	146	—
Arbroath Infirmary	—	9	—	9
Ayshire Central and Maternity Hospital	142	—	141	—
Balfour Hospital	—	8	—	8
Belford Hospital	—	6	—	6
Bellshill Maternity Hospital	114	—	104	—
Borders General Hospital	28	—	28	—
Caithness General Hospital	15	—	15	—
Calton Hospital	—	7	—	6
Chalmers Hospital	—	10	—	10
Cresswell Maternity Hospital	43	—	44	—
Daliburgh Hospital	—	3	—	4
Dalrymple Hospital	—	8	—	8
Davidson Cottage Hospital	—	2	—	2
Dunfermline Maternity Hospital	38	—	38	—
Dunoon and District General Hospital	—	8	—	8
Eastern General Hospital	50	—	50	—
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	50	—	50	—
Forth Park Hospital	88	—	88	—
Fraserburgh Hospital	—	8	—	8
Fyfe Jamieson Maternity Home	—	8	—	8
Gilbert Bain Hospital	—	10	—	10
Glasgow Royal Maternity Hospital	96	—	98	—
Insch and District War Memorial Hospital	—	4	—	4
Islay Hospital	—	3	—	2
Isle of Arran War Memorial Hospital	—	4	—	3
Jubilee Hospital	—	7	—	7
Kincardine O'Neil War Memorial Hospital	—	6	—	5
Lady Margaret Hospital	—	—	—	—
Law Hospital	—	—	3	—
Leanchoil Hospital	—	6	—	5
Lewis Hospital	13	—	10	—
Mackinnon Memorial Hospital	—	1	—	1
Maryhill Maternity Ward	—	13	—	13
Mid Argyll Hospital	—	3	—	2
Montrose Royal Infirmary	—	7	—	7
Ninewells Hospital	104	—	100	—
Oban Maternity Hospital	—	6	—	6
Perth Royal Infirmary	35	—	35	—
Peterhead Cottage Hospital	—	10	—	7
Portree Hospital	—	1	—	1
Queen Mother's Hospital	93	—	89	—
Raigmore Hospital	72	—	72	—
Rankin Memorial Hospital	38	—	36	—
Royal Alexandra Hospital	75	—	76	—
Rutherglen Maternity Hospital	82	—	82	—
Seafield Hospital	—	6	—	6
Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion	141	—	135	—
Southern General Hospital	56	—	60	—
St. John's Hospital at Howden	46	—	44	—
Stirling Royal Infirmary	52	—	50	—
Stobhill Hospital	43	—	17	—
Summerfield Maternity Hospital	22	—	—	—
Thornyflat Maternity Hospital	—	9	—	—
Town and County Hospital Nairn	4	—	—	—
Turner Memorial Hospital	—	3	—	3
Vale of Leven District General Hospital	36	—	36	—
Victoria Hospital	—	3	—	3

	31 March 1992		31 December 1992	
	Specialist obstetrics	GP obstetrics	Specialist obstetrics	GP obstetrics
Western Isles Hospital	—	—	4	—
William Smellie Maternity Hospital	50	—	47	—

Prisons Inspectorate

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the role of Her Majesty's prisons inspectorate for Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The prisons inspectorate was established in its present form following the publication in 1979 of the report by the committee of inquiry into the United Kingdom prison services which recommended that there should be a systtem of inspection of the prison service distanced as far as might be practicable from the prison departments. Subsequently, the post of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland was approved and the inspectorate commenced operations on 1 January 1981.

HMCIP's main statutory responsibility is the regular inspection of individual establishments. In carrying out this function matters which are inspected and reported on include physical conditions, quality of prisoner regimes, morale of staff and prisoners, facilities and amenities available to staff and prisoners, questions of humanity and propriety and the general efficiency and effectiveness of the establishment. Within the Scottish prison service there are 19 separate penal establishments, two of which contain special units, and it is the aim of the inspectorate to carry out a full inspection of each of these establishments once every three and a half years. Each inspection lasts for up to two weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the establishment, following which a detailed report is prepared. In addition, a one-day inspection, which may be unannounced, is undertaken annually at each establishment not being formally inspected.

Other areas of responsibility of HMCIP include the triennial inspection of legalised police cells, which are in locations distant from prisons proper, the undertaking of periodic thematic studies which focus attention on specific areas or aspects of the prison service and the production of an annual report.

The Government's White Paper on the citizens charter set out the role which inspectorates should play and I am satisfied that the prisons inspectorate are applying the key principles of that role.

Independence

HMCIP is appointed by the Crown under section 7 of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 and since the establishment of the present inspectorate in 1981 all three post-holders have been lay appointments, that is, individuals who have had no previous connection with the prison service. I intend to continue to make lay appointments to the post. In undertaking the duties of the post, HMCIP is supported by two senior prison governors who provide professional advice and guidance during the conduct of inspections and the preparation of reports. Although these officers may have future career enhancement within the service which they are inspecting, they will continue to be formally seconded to the inspectorate for the duration of their posting there. The inspectorate team is completed by an administrative civil servant who acts as staff officer.

The inspectorate determines its own programme for the inspection year and submits it to me for approval. During any inspection the inspectors have free access to any part of the establishment or to any individual therein. Reports are prepared without consultation with, or direct contribution from, the Scottish prison service and are submitted directly to me. HMCIP has no direct input to the policy or management of the Scottish prison service although recommendations in reports may have implications for either or both. Whether invited or not, HMCIP may from time to time offer comment on actual or potential developments.

Lay involvement

Lay involvement in the oversight of prisons has been separately provided for, since the last century, by the statutory appointment of visiting committees for each establishment, members of which are statutorily nominated in the case of young offenders institutions by the Secretary of State and in the case of adult prisons by local authorities. These committees act as independent observers on my behalf and have the absolute right to visit the appropriate prison whenever they wish. Their main functions are to pay frequent visits to the prison, to hear any complaints which may be made by the prisoners and to report to me any matter which they consider it expedient to report. As part of every full inspection HMCIP invariably seeks a meeting with representatives of the local visiting committee and records their views on the establishment in the final report.

HMCIP may co-opt additional lay members on to the inspection team to deal with specific issues relating to individual establishments, if necessary.

Openness

The inspectorate has published its annual inspection programme for 1993-94 and will continue to do so for future years. Arrangements are always made to meet groups of prisoners and staff during each full inspection and arrangements are now also being made to give prisoners' visitors an opportunity to meet the inspectors and, alternatively or additionally, to submit comments orally or in writing.

All the inspectorate's reports are submitted directly to me and are published in full, save occasionally as regards parts of reports which HMCIP has indicated should not be published as touching on confidential matters involving security. When published, they are invariably accompanied by my formal response. These arrangements cover not only the reports of the regular inspections of individual establishments but any thematic study reports and in particular HMCIP's annual report, publication of which is statutorily required. It is for HMCIP to decide whether to hold a press conference on the publication of reports and no restrictions are placed on discussions with the media on

matters relating to inspections. All the inspectorate's reports are available publicly—a charge now being made only in the case of the annual report.

Resources

HMCIP has no role in the allocation of resources to the Scottish prison service or among individual establishments, except insofar as recommendations may lead to a re-assessment of priorities. While the inspectorate's overriding statutory commitment is to comment on the acceptability of conditions, all reports take into account the need for cost efficiency and effectiveness.

Health (Private Services)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to permit private health care companies or private hospitals to run national health service wards or specialist units; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his policy on partnership deals with the private sector to run either hospital units or departments within units.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 4 May 1993]:* Following my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement to the House on 12 November, the Government have been encouraging the participation of private sector interests in the provision of public services. I welcome the utilisation of private finance in the national health service where this would provide improved standards of health care for patients or an opportunity for cost savings to be allocated to other health care projects. It is for individual health bodies to consider specific projects.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the letter of 2 April on Scottish Office guidance on opencast coal production from M. T. Affolter of Scottish Office Environment Department to David Jarman of West Lothian district council.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Arrangements will be made for a copy of the Department's letter to Mr. Jarman to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

School Transport

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase resources available to education authorities in Scotland to enable more flexible school transport in rural areas.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* It is for local authorities themselves to determine the level of expenditure on school transport in the light of their overall spending priorities and taking into account local needs. In distributing Government support to local authorities through aggregate external finance, account is taken of the differing population settlement patterns in rural areas.

Manufacturing Jobs

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many manufacturing jobs there were in Scotland in December 1979 and December 1992; what was the proportion of manufacturing jobs as a percentage of the total number of jobs in each of those years; and if he will make a statement about the future of manufacturing industry.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The figures showing the number of manufacturing jobs in Scotland in December 1979 and December 1992, and the proportion of manufacturing jobs as a percentage of the total number of jobs in these years are set out in the table. These are taken from the "Civilian Workforce in Employment Estimates" compiled by the Employment Department.

	December	
	1979	*1992*
Total employees in employment (thousands)	2,094	1,967
Employees in manufacturing (thousands)	596	348
Manufacturing as a percentage of total employers	28·5 per cent.	17·7 per cent.

Despite reductions in Scottish manufacturing employment since 1979, output in this sector has increased. This has been achieved by substantial productivity increases. Future manufacturing success will be determined by the ability of Scotland's producers to compete in domestic and overseas markets.

The Government's objective is to provide an overall economic framework in which Scottish manufacturers can flourish. This strategy is succeeding. The latest business survey evidence reveals that Scottish manufacturing firms expect an increase in total new orders, the volume of output and exported goods in forthcoming months.

Appointments

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise and for each of the local enterprise companies the names of the chairman and board members, their occupations or professions and their allowances, salaries or other remuneration payable.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The names, occupations and current salaries of the chairmen and board members of Scottish Enterprise and of Highlands and Islands Enterprise are as follows:

Scottish Enterprise

Members	*Occupation*	*Salary from 1 April 1993 (£)*
Chairman (part-time)		
Professor Donald Iain MacKay, MA, FRSE	Chairman, PIEDA plc	47,552
Deputy Chairman		
Ronald Garrick, CBE	Managing Director and Chief Executive, the Weir Group	10,545
Members		
Professor Andrew Bain	Visiting Professor in Economics, Glasgow University	7,030
Tom Farmer, CBE	Chairman and Chief Executive, Kwik-Fit	7,030
Charles Gray, JP	President, COSLA	7,030
Sir Graham Hills	Former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde; Scottish Governor of the BBC	7,030
Glenda Hogarth-Coull, MBE	Managing Director, Hogarth Safety Wear	7,030
Barbara Kelly, CBE	Member, Equal Opportunities Commission; Chair, Training 2000	7,030
Cameron McLatchie OBE	Chairman and Chief Executive British Polythene Industries plc	7,030
Professor John Calman Shaw, CBE	Deputy Governor, Bank of Scotland; Chairman, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council	7,030
Yvonne Strachan	Chairwoman, Scottish Convention of Women; Scottish Women's Organiser, TGWU	7,030
Chief Executive (ex-officio member)		
Crawford Beveridge		93,732

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Members	*Occupation*	*Salary from 1 April 1993 (£)*
Chairman (part-time)		
A. Fraser Morrison, CBE	Chairman and Managing Director, Morrison Construction Group	26,762
Members (part-time)		
John A. D. Harrison, OBE	Chairman, Johnston's of Elgin	7,030
Dr. James Hunter	Journalist; Adviser to the Crofters Union; Member, Board of Trustees, John Muir Trust	7,030
Angus S. MacDonald, CBE	Farmer; Director, Grampian Television	7,030
Valerie MacIver	Chair, Highland Regional Council Education Committee; Member, Ross and Cromarty District Council; Member, Cromarty Firth Port Authority	7,030
John D. M. Robertson, CBE	Chairman, Robertson Group of Companies; Chairman, Orkney Health Board; Chairman, Highland Health Board	7,030
Peter Timms, MBE	Managing Director, Flexible Technology, Bute	7,030
John Angus Mackay	Director, Gaelic Television Committee; Member, Scottish Arts Council	7,030
Chief Executive (ex-officio member)		
Iain A. Robertson		58,580

Chairmen and board members of the local enterprise companies are not appointed by my right hon. Friend. Their names are listed in their respective annual reports and accounts which are available from the local enterprise companies themselves. The contracts between Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies in their respective areas prohibit the payment to local enterprise companies chairmen or board members of any remuneration from payments made by Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise; however, out-of-pocket expenses may be reimbursed.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each of the hospital trusts the names of the board members, their occupations or professions and any allowances or remuneration payable.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Occupation/Profession	*Annual remuneration (£)*
ABERDEEN ROYAL HOSPITALS NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. A. Bryan Broomfield	Managing Director	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Professor Graeme Catto	University Professor	5,000
Professor Michael Meston	University Professor	5,000
Mr. Harold Tocher	Retired Banker	5,000
Dr. Fiona Lyle	Retired General Practitioner	5,000
Mrs. Ann D. Scott	Tax Partner	5,000
AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Aileen K. Bates	Former Nurse Teacher	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. Ian Allison	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Mr. David Gall	Retired Policeman	5,000
Mr. Robert Johnston	Solicitor	5,000
Dr. Susan Kinnaird	Auditor	5,000
Mr. W. Scott McConnell	Retail Pharmacist	5,000
CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. George Bruce	Former Company Manager	15,125
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. John Gunn	Chartered Accountant	5,000

	Occupation/Profession	Annual remuneration (£)
Rev. Alexander Murray	Minister	5,000
Dr. Elizabeth MacKenzie	Retired General Practitioner	5,000
Mr. John Rosie	Technical Assistant	5,000
Ms Wilma Taylor	Retired Nurse	5,000
DUNDEE TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. Stuart Fair	Solicitor	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Maureen Cane	Retired University Lecturer	5,000
Mr. Gordon Lowden	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Mr. Robert Lyon	University Senior Lecturer	5,000
Mrs. Jacqueline Wood	Housewife	5,000
Professor Heather Dick	University Professor	5,000
GRAMPIAN HEALTH CARE NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Dr. Alexander J. Taylor	Retired General Practitioner	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. Marcus Humphrey	Farmer	5,000
Mr. Thomas Murison	Managing Director	5,000
Mr. George Robb	Company Director	5,000
Mrs. Joan Catto	Solicitor	5,000
Mr. Hance Fullerton	Chief Executive	5,000
MONKLANDS AND BELLSHILL NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Dr. George Bell	Retired General Practitioner	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Ann Irvine	Sales Consultant	5,000
Mr. Donald MacDonald	Executive Director	5,000
Dr. Michael Moore	University Reader	5,000
Mrs. Alison Morrison	Veterinary Surgeon	5,000
Mr. William Huggins	Retired Finance Director	5,000
MORAY HEALTH SERVICES NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. James Snedden	Retired Banker	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Marjory Adams	Teacher	5,000
Mr. Russell Anderson	Farmer	5,000
Mrs. Lydia King	Retired Teacher	5,000
Mr. William Phillips	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Mr. James Royan	Master Butcher	5,000
NORTH AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. William Ritchie	Retired Civil Engineer	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Angela Dunbar	School Attendance Officer	5,000
Mrs. Kim Donald	Company Secretary	5,000
Mr. James Grier	Retired Banker	5,000
Mr. Alan Stewart	Solicitor	5,000
Mr. Keith Tulloch	Chartered Accountant	5,000
RAIGMORE HOSPITAL NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. James Kyle	Retired Surgeon	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. James Gray	Retired Health Board Treasurer	5,000
Mrs. Flora Hunt	Solicitor	5,000
Mr. Alexander Morrison	Master Baker	5,000
Professor George McNicol	Retired University Vice-Chancellor	5,000
Mrs. Judith Robertson	Housewife	5,000
ROYAL ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. Tom Gibson	former Hospice Director	17,145

	Occupation/Profession	Annual remuneration (£)
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Audrey Burns	Housewife	5,000
Mr. Allan Durward	Retired Chief Executive	5,000
Mrs. Marion Ford	Housewife	5,000
Mr. Alec Macdonald Gaunt	Retired Commandant, Erskine Hospital	5,000
Mr. George Murray	Retired Locomotive Driver	5,000
ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL HOSPITAL AND COMMUNITY NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. Adrian D. Ward	Solicitor	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. William Hughes	Company Chairman	5,000
Ms Valerie Smart	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Professor Averil Stewart	College Professor	5,000
Mr. David Tarr	Chief Scientific Engineer	5,000
Dr. Peter Williams	Senior Engineer	5,000
SOUTH AYRSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. Douglas Brown	Retired Surgeon	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. William M. Mowatt	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Mr. Harold J. Currie	Business Consultant	5,000
Mr. Graeme McKinstry	Solicitor	5,000
Mrs. Anne Wilson	Housewife	5,000
Mrs. Dorothy McLellan	Housewife	5,000
SOUTHERN GENERAL HOSPITAL NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. Andrew Garland	Partner, Construction Company	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. Robert McEwan	Retired Director, Scottish Development Agency	5,000
Mrs. Ann Moore	Solicitor	5,000
Mrs. Agnes Stewart	Tax Adviser	5,000
Mr. Henry Tankel	Retired Surgeon	5,000
Mrs. Susan Bell	Company Director	5,000
STIRLING ROYAL INFIRMARY NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. George B. McKelvie	Retired Surgeon	17,145
Non-executive directors:		
Mrs. Agnes Bowie	Company Director	5,000
Mr. Graham Houston	Head of Industrial Society	5,000
Mrs. Doris Littlejohn	President, Industrial Tribunals	5,000
Mr. Graeme Simmers	Retired Company Chairman	5,000
Mrs. Anne Walker	University Research Fellow	5,000
VICTORIA INFIRMARY NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Dr. John L. C. Dall	Retired Physician	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Dr. Robert Colville	Retired General Practitioner	5,000
Mrs. Danielle Glasser	Solicitor	5,000
Mrs. Lorna Howieson	Pharmacist	5,000
Mrs. Alison Gilchrist	Company Director	5,000
Mr. Desmond O'Brien	Chartered Accountant	5,000
WEST LOTHIAN NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mr. Robert S. Watt	Chairman of Livingston Development Corporation	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Mr. Thomas Bennie	Retired Banker	5,000
Mr. Jack Cunningham	Retired Trade Union Secretary	5,000
Mrs. Irene Douglas	Company Accountant	5,000
Mr. Peter Johnston	School Teacher	5,000
Mrs. Carole Stevenson	Housewife	5,000

	Occupation/Profession	Annual remuneration (£)
YORKHILL NHS TRUST		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Joan Cameron	Housewife	19,285
Non-executive directors:		
Dr. John Davidson	Retired Consultant Radiologist	5,000
Mrs. Margaret Hall	Solicitor	5,000
Mr. Ronald Cleland	Partner, Recruitment Consultancy	5,000
Mrs. Gwendoline Garner	Field Worker, Action for Sick Children	5,000
Mrs. Sally Kuenssberg	Children's Panel Training Organiser	5,000

Executive directors are appointed directly by trust boards, which also determine their salaries.

In addition to the remuneration payable, the chairmen and non-executive directors are entitled to claim travelling and subsistence allowances at rates set for members of public bodies.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each of the health boards the names of the chairman and board members, their occupations or professions and their level of allowances or remuneration payable.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Occupation/profession	Annual remuneration (£)
ARGYLL AND CLYDE HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. R. R. Reid	Farmer	17,700
Non-executive members:		
Mr. M. D. Jones	Company Director	5,000
Mrs. E. S. Lander	Company Director	5,000
Mrs. J. C. Le Roux	Housewife	5,000
Dr. J. Moffat	Retired Consultant Psychiatrist	5,000
Mrs. S. Nelson	Primary School Teacher	5,000
Mr. C. H. Parker	Company Director	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. I. C. Smith	General Manager	—
Dr. A. A. Reid	Director of Public Health	—
AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. W. G. Donaldson	Electrical Engineer	14,835
Non-executive members:		
Dr. K. G. Fegan	General Medical Practitioner	5,000
Mr. J. H. Greene	Solicitor	5,000
Miss M. W. Grosset	Company Secretary	5,000
Miss K. A Paterson	Retired Nurse	5,000
Mrs. E. Reid	Health Carer	5,000
Mr. W. Young	Company Director	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. J. M. Eckford	General Manager	—
Mr. N. R. Lammie	Director of Finance	—
Mrs. M. Durie	Director of Quality and Service Development/Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
Dr. A. D. W. Walker	Director of Health Planning and Public Health	—
BORDERS HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. D. A. G. Kilshaw	Solicitor	11,960
Non-executive members:		
Rev. A. Bennett	Minister	5,000
Miss M. Marshall	Chartered Secretary	5,000
Mr. J. P. Metcalfe	Retired Company Chairman	5,000
Dr. A. G. Paton	Retired General Practitioner	5,000
Lady Sanderson	Business Consultant	5,000
Mr. H. S. U. Steven	NFU Secretary	

	Occupation/profession	Annual remuneration (£)
Executive members:		
Mr. D. A. Peters	General Manager	—
Dr. I. A. McDonald	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. J. S. Wilson	Director of Finance	—
Mrs. A. Weston	Director of Quality Assurance/Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. A. McIntyre	Farmer	11,960
Non-executive members:		
Mrs. V. M. I. Jardine, Paterson	Housewife	5,000
Mr. H. S. McFadzean	Farmer	5,000
Dr. J. R. C. Stubbs	Retired Anaesthetist	5,000
Mrs. M. J. Thomson	Former Member, South of Scotland Electricity Board	5,000
Mrs. J. D. Tulloch	Company Director	5,000
Dr. A. P. D. Wilkinson	General Practitioner	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. D. J. Banks	General Manager	—
Mr. D. McEachran	Director of Finance	—
Mr. P. J. Kelly	Director of Quality/Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
Mr. P. Milligan	Director of Contracts and Planning	—
Dr. I. MacLean	Director of Public Health	—
FIFE HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. R. Baker	Company Director	14,835
Non-executive members:		
Mrs. S. L. Aitken	Housewife	5,000
Dr. A. C. A. Alexander	General Practitioner	5,000
Mr. F. J. R. Craig	Company Director	5,000
Mrs. M. Steedman	Retired Headmistress	5,000
Mrs. C. Stenhouse	Housewife	5,000
Mr. G. M. Thomson	Chartered Accountant	5,000
Executive members:		
Dr. I. S. Jones	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. M. D. Murray	Director of Finance	—
Mrs. J. Edey	Director of Strategic Planning and Contracts	—
FORTH VALLEY HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mrs. J. I. D. Isbister	Mental Welfare Commissioner	14,835
Non-executive members:		
Mr. E. T. M. Bell-Scott	Solicitor	5,000
Mr. K. Harding	Newsagent	5,000
Dr. G. B. Hastings	Unit Director, Strathclyde University	5,000
Mr. P. A. Joynson	Chartered Surveyor	5,000
Mrs. K. A. Smith	Emergency Services Organiser, WRVS	5,000
Mr. C. S. R. Stroyan	Solicitor	5,000
Executive members:		
Dr. D. C. Moir	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. D. F. Hird	Director of Finance	—
GRAMPIAN HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Dr. C. A. MacLeod	Company Chairman	20,180
Non-executive members:		
Mr. J. K. O. Arbuthnott	Estate Owner/Manager	5,000
Mrs. C. A. Ferguson	Housewife/Farmer	5,000
Mr. G. McLellan	Senior Executive	5,000
Professor D. Ogston	University Professor	5,000
Mrs. M. E. L. Park	Solicitor	5,000
Mrs. J. G. A. Wisely	Housewife	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. F. Hartnett	General Manager	—

	Occupation/profession	Annual remuneration (£)
Mr. A. J. Cumming	Director of Finance	—
Dr. H. R. M. Wilson	Director of Contracts	—
Ms H. Blumer	Director of Planning	—
Dr. G. Paterson	Director of Public Health	—
GREATER GLASGOW HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. W. S. Fyfe	Company Chairman	25,140
Non-executive members:		
Rev. R. D. M. Campbell	Minister	5,000
Mr. P. W. Holst	Company Director	5,000
Professor R. M. Mackie	University Professor	5,000
Mr. W. C. McCreath	Solicitor	5,000
Mrs. J. Mackenzie	Housewife	5,000
Mr. P. H. L. I. Runciman	Retired Company Chairman	5,000
Mr. A. Scobbie	Managing Director	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. L. E. Peterken	General Manager	—
Dr. G. D. Forwell	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. C. M. Gordon	Director of Finance	—
Mr. T. A. Divers	Director of Planning and Contracts	—
HIGHLAND HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. D. M. Robertson	Company Chairman	14,835
Non-executive members:		
Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	Retired Bank Manager	5,000
Dr. D. J. MacDonald	Retired General Practitioner	5,000
Mr. D. J. Mackay	Chief Executive	5,000
Mrs. A. MacPherson	Farm Business Partner	5,000
Mr. C. Neilson	Retail Businessman	5,000
Mrs. C. Thomson	Company Director	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. R. R. W. Stewart	General Manager	—
Dr. G. V. Stone	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. M. Iredale	Director of Finance	—
Mr. D. T. Wright	Director of Quality Assurance/Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
LANARKSHIRE HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. I. L. Livingstone	Solicitor	17,700
Non-executive members:		
Dr. W. Criggie	General Practitioner	5,000
Mrs. A. S. Hinshalwood	Housewife	5,000
Mrs. M. McIvin	Teacher	5,000
Mr. D. A. Millar	Business Consultant	5,000
Mr. J. P. Robinson	Retired Colliery Official	5,000
Mr. J. Thomson	Director, Voluntary Organisation	5,000
Executive members:		
Mr. F. Clark	General Manager	—
Dr. J. B. P. Ferguson	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. M. Docherty	Director of Finance	—
Mr. B. Gill	Director of Corporate Planning and Estates	—
Miss E. Hastings	Director of Quality Assurance/Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
LOTHIAN HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Dr. J. W. Baynham	Company Director	22,660
Non-executive members:		
Professor R. C. B. Aitken	University Professor	5,000
Mrs. G. Barton	Housewife	5,000
Mr. J. A. Campbell	Chartered Surveyor	5,000
Mr. R. Findlay	Chief Executive, Radio Forth	5,000
Mrs. M. B. M. Knox	Housewife	5,000
Mr. G. S. Millar	Community Pharmacist	5,000

	Occupation/profession	Annual remuneration (£)
Executive members:		
Mr. J. Lusby	General Manager	—
Dr. H. Zealley	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. P. Wilson	Director of Operations	—
Dr. L. Burley	Director of Planning and Development	—
ORKNEY HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. Leslie	Pharmacist	7,200
Non-executive members:		
Mr. J. Flett	Solicitor	2,000
Mr. E. M. Gibson	Retired Assistant Headteacher	2,000
Captain M. Gunn	Ships Master	2,000
Mrs. E. B. Kerr	Housewife	2,000
Mr. J. Rendall	Sub-Postmaster/Postman	2,000
Dr. J. S. Walker	General Practitioner	2,000
Executive members:		
Mr. R. Allan	Director of Finance	—
SHETLAND HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mrs. F. B. Grains	Housewife	7,200
Non-executive members:		
Mrs. M. U. Colligan	Retired Teacher	2,000
Squadron Leader B. P. Gregson	Local Government Officer	2,000
Dr. M. D. Hunter	General Practitioner	2,000
Mr. R. L. Johnson	Retired Businessman	2,000
Mrs. T. A. Leslie	Teaching Auxillary	2,000
Mr. J. Telford	Chartered Accountant	2,000
Executive members:		
Mr. B. Atherton	General Manager	—
Dr. D. Cox	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. D. P. P. Eva	Director of Finance	—
Mrs. M. Henderson	Director of Contracts and Standards/ Chief Area Nursing Officer	—
TAYSIDE HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. J. C. MacFarlane	Retired Company Director	20,180
Non-executive members:		
Rev. K. Campbell	Minister	5,000
Mr. D. W. M. Davidson	Pharmacist	5,000
Mrs. V. Joiner	Company Director	5,000
Mr. H. C. Nicoll	Retired Local Government Officer	5,000
Professor R. E. Olver	University Professor	5,000
Mr. I. Sandison	Retired Company Director	5,000
Executive members:		
Dr. R. C. Graham	General Manager	—
Dr. L. Cameron	Director of Public Health	—
Mr. J. R. Hudson	Director of Finance	—
Miss E. Edwards	Chief Area Nursing officer/Director of Quality	—
WESTERN ISLES HEALTH BOARD		
Chairman:		
Mr. A. Matheson	Pharmacist	7,200
Non-executive members:		
Dr. S. M. Brydon	General Practitioner	2,000
Mr. J. A. Harrison	Deputy Head Teacher	2,000
Mr. A. W. Hay	Retired Sales Director	2,000
Mrs. C. R. MacAskill	Housewife	2,000
Mrs. F. M. T. MacDonald	Solicitor	2,000
Mr. M. MacLennan	Building Society Manager	2,000
Executive members:		
Mr. G. Stobbs	Director of Finance and Contracts	—

Executive members are employees of health boards and receive no additional remuneration for board membership. In addition to the remuneration indicated above, non-executive members are entitled to claim travelling and subsistence allowances at rates set for members of public bodies.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the public bodies for which he is responsible, *(b)* their overall expenditure in 1992-93 for the most recent year for which figures are available, *(c)* the total number of people appointed to these bodies, *(d)* the number of males and females and *(e)* the total sum paid in allowances or salaries or other types of remuneration.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1992" which was published on 29 January 1993 and a copy of which is available in the Library. This publication includes information on expenditure, membership and remuneration for the bodies for which I am responsible.

NHS Funding

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the criteria used to assess whether or not a service should receive NHS funding.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Section 1 of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 provides that it shall continue to be the duty of the Secretary of State to promote in Scotland a comprehensive and integrated health service designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people of Scotland, and the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness. Within that framework health boards are responsible for assessing the health needs of the population in their areas and for determining their own priorities for purchasing or providing services to meet these needs from the general resources allocated to them. Central funding is now authorised only where it is necessary to facilitate the introduction and orderly provision and development of new high-cost, low-throughput priority services with good success rates, such as heart or liver transplantation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Whaling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals are being put forward by Her Majesty's Government to the 45th meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Kyoto, Japan from 10 to 14 May; and what are his objectives for the meeting.

Mr. Curry: The Government's primary objective is to secure a continuation of the present international moratorium on commercial whaling. We have made it very clear that we cannot even contemplate the lifting of the present moratorium until we are satisfied about the state of stocks; have full agreement on effective measures for their management, including a transparent and rigorous means for enforcement and inspection; and have humane methods of killing whales.

At the IWC meeting, we shall be looking for positive responses to the United Kingdom resolutions, adopted at last year's meeting, on an 11-point action plan for future work on humane killing and on the concerns we highlighted relating to the Faroese pilot whaling drive fishery. We will be pressing for progress on considering the French proposal for an Antarctic whale sanctuary and on pursuing the United Kingdom resolution, adopted last year, on environmental threats to whales in the Antarctic and elsewhere. We shall continue to oppose "scientific" whaling that fails to meet two important pre-conditions: the IWC must be satisfied that the stocks of whales involved are in good condition and that the research is essential in providing information which cannot be obtained by non-lethal means. We aim to pursue improved protection, under IWC auspices, for small cetaceans. And we are producing a paper for discussion at the meeting that seeks IWC support for our proposals to encourage the growth and proper regulation of whale watching as a non-lethal and non-damaging means of exploiting whale resources.

Minimum Sugar Requirement

Mr. Faber: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government intend to abolish the minimum sugar requirement; and whether they intend to introduce a maximum caffeine limit in soft drinks.

Mr. Soames: The Government have today laid before Parliament regulations revoking the requirement in the Soft Drinks Regulations 1964 and the parallel regulations in Scotland, for a minimum amount of sugar to be added during the manufacture of soft drinks. Given current dietary advice on reducing sugar intake, it is clearly sensible to remove this statutory limit. It is also a step in the direction of deregulation, in that it would leave manufacturers free to decide themselves whether or not sugar should be added during the manufacture of soft drinks. We are looking at the remainder of the regulations as part of the Government's deregulation exercise.

We have decided, at this stage, not to introduce a maximum caffeine limit for soft drinks. I have asked the Food Advisory Committee to review its 1988 recommendation about the need for such a limit, as there appears to have been no reported adverse affects on young children following the introduction of high-caffeine soft drinks. Also, any restriction would have only a limited effect as it could not apply to soft drinks manufactured and imported from other EC member states. I want to be sure that there is a real need for any limit before proceeding in this direction.

WALES

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the percentage of British domestic non-business visitors to Wales staying in *(a)* licensed hotels, *(b)* unlicensed hotels/guest houses/bed and breakfast, *(c)* holiday camps, *(d)* camping, *(e)* touring caravan, *(f)* static caravan, *(g)* rented property, *(h)* second home and *(i)* other in each year from 1985 onwards.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is given in the following table:

Second home3244224
Other202930262629

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the percentage of non-business overseas visitors to Wales staying in *(a)* licensed hotels, *(b)* unlicensed hotels/guest houses/bed and breakfast, *(c)* holiday camp, *(d)* camping accommodation, *(e)* touring caravan, *(f)* static caravans, *(g)* rented property, *(h)* second home and *(i)* other in each year from 1985 onwards; and if he will break the figures down to include (i) all overseas visitors, (ii) European visitors and (iii) visitors from the rest of the world.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested that is available is given in the following table:

Overseas visitors to Wales 1991[1]

	Percentage
Licensed hotels	21
Unlicensed hotels/ guest houses/ bed and breakfast	29
Camping	5
Touring caravan	1
Static caravan	1
Rented property	2
Other	41

[1] Information is not available for previous years.
Source: Overseas Visitor Survey.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the location of holidays undertaken by British domestic tourists in Wales in each year from 1985 onwards indicating the percentage staying *(a)* at the seaside, *(b)* in a small town, *(c)* in a large town, *(d)* in the countryside and *(e)* unspecified.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is given in the following table:

Location of holidays by domestic (United Kingdom) visitors to Wales[1]

Percentage

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1990*	*1991*
Seaside	49	48	34	47	54	61
Small town	6	9	8	7	16	13
Large city/large town	4	5	10	12	8	9
Countryside/village	33	31	43	27	26	21
Not specified	8	8	6	9	—	—

[1] Information is not available for 1989.
Source: 1985 British Home Tourism Survey.
1986-88 British Tourism Survey (monthly).
1990-91 United Kingdom Tourism Survey.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the mode of transport used by British domestic tourists visiting Wales, showing the percentage travelling *(a)* by car, *(b)* by scheduled bus/coach *(c)* by coach tour, *(d)* by train and *(e)* other in each year since 1985.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is given in the following table:

Mode of transport used by British domestic tourists visiting Wales

percentage

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Car	78	72	80	83	81	83	85
Scheduled bus/coach	4	4	4	3	5	4	3
Coach tour	3	6	5	2	4	3	3
Train	6	6	5	6	6	5	4
Other	9	12	6	6	4	5	5

Source:
1985 British Home Tourism Survey
1986-1988 British Tourism Survey (Monthly)
1989-1991 United Kingdom Tourism Survey

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the distribution of British domestic tourists in Wales in each year since 1985 indicating *(a)* the number of trips, *(b)* the number of nights stayed and *(c)* the amount spent in (i) north Wales, (ii) mid-Wales, (iii) south Wales and (iv) Wales, unspecified.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is in the following table:

Domestic tourists in Wales

Millions

	Trips	*Nights*	*Amount spent (£)*
1985			
North Wales	4·3	21·0	194
Mid Wales	2·0	9·0	96
South Wales	4·7	20·0	210
1986			
North Wales	4·4	24·0	177
Mid Wales	2·4	12·0	121
South Wales	5·2	24·0	202
1987			
North Wales	4·0	18·0	216
Mid Wales	1·7	9·5	123
South Wales	5·6	22·5	246
1988			
North Wales	3·5	19·0	256
Mid Wales	1·9	8·0	100
South Wales	5·6	23·0	269
1989			
North Wales	3·3	16·5	433
Mid Wales	1·3	6·1	123
South Wales	4·9	20·5	430
1990			
North Wales	3·0	15·0	364
Mid Wales	1·6	7·2	157
South Wales	3·8	14·7	377
1991			
North Wales	3·2	15·9	425
Mid Wales	1·4	6·7	145
South Wales	4·2	17·7	430

Source:
1985 British Home Tourism Survey.
1986-1988 British Tourism Survey (Monthly).
1989-1991 United Kingdom Tourism Survey.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of British domestic tourists in Wales in each year since 1985 used *(a)* hotels/guest houses/bed and breakfast, *(b)* self-catering, *(c)* holiday camp and *(d)* other accommodation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is given in the following table:

Accommodation used by British domestic tourists in Wales—All tourism trips

Percentage

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Hotels/guest houses/bed and breakfasts	18	20	15	23	16	21	17
Self catering	12	9	7	7	7	13	11
Holiday camps	4	3	2	4	3	3	4
Other	66	68	76	66	74	63	68

Source:
1985 British Home Tourism survey.
1986-1988 British Tourism Survey (Monthly).
1989-1991 United Kingdom Tourism Survey.

Athrawon Bro Teachers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement outlining the effect of the proposed unitary authorities in Wales upon the deployment of Athrawon Bro teachers.

Mr. David Hunt: Responsibility for the development of teams of mobile teachers or expert advisers concerned with teaching Welsh as a second language in junior schools would be a matter for the new authorities. It would thus be for the shadow authorities to consider and set out their proposals for such teachers in their service delivery plans.

Maternity Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospitals in Wales which had consultant obstetric and/or general practitioner maternity beds in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with the numbers of beds of each type in each hospital in each year.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information for 1991-92 is given in the following table. Information for 1992-93 is not yet available.

Hospital	*Average daily available beds*	
	Obstetric	*General practioner maternity*
Clwyd:		
H M Stanley	51·0	—
Ysbyty Maelor	49·5	—
Llangollen	—	4·5
Catherine Gladstone	—	8·0
Chirk Community	—	3·0
East Dyfed:		
West Wales General	32·0	—
Bronglais	16·0	—
Gwent:		
Nevill Hall	46·0	10·0
Royal Gwent	80·8	9·0
Gwynedd		
St. Davids	61·0	—
Bryn Beryl	—	5·0
Dollgellau and Barmouth	—	7·0
Tywyn and District	—	2·3

Hospital	Average daily available beds: Obstetric	General practioner maternity
Mid Glamorgan:		
Prince Charles	29·9	—
Aberdare	15·2	3·8
Merthyr General	12·5	—
Princess of Wales	38·0	—
Caerphilly District Miners	41·0	—
East Glamorgan	52·9	—
Pembrokeshire:		
Withybush	31·5	8·4
Powys:		
Llandrindod Wells	—	4·0
Llanidloes	—	4·2
Montgomery County Infirmary	—	4·0
Victoria Memorial	—	8·0
Bro Ddyfi	—	2·0
Knighton	—	2·0
Breconshire War Memorial	—	6·0
Builth Cottage	—	3·0
South Glamorgan:		
University Hospital of Wales	71·0	—
Llandough	65·5	—
West Glamorgan:		
Singleton	74·0	—
Morriston	10·1	—
Gorseinon	6·0	—
Neath General	38·5	—

Wales Council for the Disabled

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met officials from the Wales Council for the Disabled; what was discussed; and when he next expects to meet the council.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have not yet met Wales Council for the Disabled, but my officials have very close contact with the organisation, which receives substantial support from the Welsh Office—for example, grant aid of £315,000 in 1992-93.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary was invited to meet the staff side officers of the Joint Staff Consultative Council for the Welsh health service to discuss industrial relations in some NHS trusts; what was his response; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A meeting was proposed in a letter dated 6 April. NHS trusts have operational freedom to manage their own affairs, including the conduct of industrial relations with staff interests. The matters raised should be discussed with the NHS trusts concerned and a meeting with me would not be helpful. My private secretary replied accordingly on 28 April.

Agriculture

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of Welsh gross domestic product is currently provided by Welsh agriculture.

Mr. David Hunt: Provisional figures for 1991 show that agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for 2·1 per cent. of Welsh gross domestic product.

Doctors' Hours of Work

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, column *413*, over what period of time the maximum average of 83 hours of work per week by junior doctors is calculated; and what consultations he has had with health authorities and NHS trusts as to whether any junior doctor is working, on average, above 83 hours per week in breach of contract.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The average weekly hours of duty for junior doctors is calculated over their normal rostered duty period. Health authorities and NHS trusts have recently been asked to report on the hours of duty of all junior doctors.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the forms and publications that have been produced by his Department for General publication within the last six months indicating which of these have been produced in the Welsh language or bilingually in Welsh and English.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Comprehensive information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Aggregates Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received regarding plans by the aggregates industry in Wales to expand their activities.

Mr. David Hunt: In response to my Department's recent public consultation on the draft revision of minerals planning guidance note 6 "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales", comments were received from 20 bodies, including local authority, conservation and industry interests.

Prince of Wales Orthopaedic Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the south Glamorgan health authority in relation to the closure of St. Fagan's ward at the Prince of Wales orphopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the health authority. I am not aware of any plans to decommission St. Fagan's ward.

Dentists

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether Powys family health services authority has applied to his Department for authority to employ salaried dentists in the Builth Wells area;

(2) what action he is taking to secure the availability of national health service dental treatment for patients in areas of South Powys not covered by dentists in Brecon and Hay-on-Wye.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The responsibility for administering NHS general dental services in South Powys rests with the Powys family health services authority. The authority applied to the Department on 5 May for permission to employ a salaried dentist in Builth Wells and the application is being given urgent and careful consideration. In the meantime, the authority is able to help any patient in its area experiencing difficulty in obtaining NHS dental treatment.

Mr. Alnger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of dentists in Wales who have informed their local family health services authority that they will no longer treat NHS patients in each of the eight FHSAs since April 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available centrally in the form requested. Fortnightly returns from family health services authorities in Wales indicate that, as a direct result of the new fee scale introduced on 8 July 1992, 29 general dental practitioners gave written notice to have their names removed from FHSA dental lists from 1 August 1992 to 23 April 1993. The figures are as follows, alongside the number of dentists joining the lists in the same period.

FHSA	*Number of dentists leaving dental lists as a direct result of new fee scale*	*Number of dentists joining dental lists*
Clwyd	10	11
Dyfed	1	6
Gwent	10	17
Gwynedd	1	5
Mid Glamorgan	7	8
Powys	0	2
South Glamorgan	0	10
West Glamorgan	0	0
Total	29	59

The information given in these fortnightly returns was intended for general managerial purposes and is not statistically validated.

Mr. Alnger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many salaried dentists posts are currently vacant in Wales;

(2) how many salaried dentists posts he has approved since April 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Approval has been given for Dyfed and Gwynedd family health services authorities to employ a total of six whole-time-equivalent salaried dentists. Both authorities are in the process of identifying suitable applicants and premises.

Mr. Alnger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of independent dentists carrying out NHS work in Wales in April 1992 and April 1993 in each of the eight FHSAs.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information as at 31 March 1992 is given in the following table. Information as at 31 March 1993 is not yet available.

General dental practitioners carrying out NHS work as at 31 March 1992

	Number
Clwyd	116
Dyfed	101
Gwent	134
Gwynedd	65
Mid Glamorgan	140
Powys	34
South Glamorgan	131
West Glamorgan	132

I will write to the hon. Member as soon as figures for 1993 become available.

Cancer Services

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the numbers of cancer registrations in Wales for each of the last five years available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest registration figures for all malignant neoplasms from the Welsh cancer registry are published by the Welsh Office in "Health and Personal Social Services for Wales, No. 19, 1992", available in the Library of the House. These data represent the most reliable published information on cancer registrations.

The following table shows the number of such registrations and the year-on-year percentage difference.

Year	*Registration of all malignant neoplasms*	*Change of previous year per cent.*
1984	14,480	+3·2
1985	14,899	+2·9
1986	14,635	−1·8
1987	15,345	+4·9
1988	16,217	+5·7

These statistics make no allowance for changes in the age and sex composition of the population. Cancers are more naturally prevalent among the elderly, who form an increasing proportion in the population. Aside from such demographic considerations, increases in the numbers of cancer registrations may be due to earlier diagnosis, more complete reporting of diagnosed cases to the cancer registry, or a real increase in the incidence of cancer.

Figures are also published by OPCS in its document "Cancer Statistics—Registrations". These differ from those shown in the table. For example, OPCS figures under-record Welsh registrations for 1986 and slightly over-record those for 1987. Differences in the two published sources arise because it has not been possible for OPCS to take on all revisions to the Welsh cancer registry data in time for inclusion in their annual publications. These revisions arise from routine validation and from several substantial data quality improvements made by the Welsh cancer registry staff.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are in part-time work in Wales; and what proportion of part-time workers are aged between 50 and 65 years.

Mr. David Hunt: Estimates from the labour force survey in autumn 1992 show that the numbers of part-time women and men in employment are 258,000 and 48,000 respectively. Of these, 21 per cent. of women and 25 per cent. of men are aged between 50 and 65 years.

Part-time work is defined to be that in which staff are contracted to work basic usual hours of up to 30 hours per week.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Wales receive disability living allowance; how many in each case are aged between 50 and 65 years; and what percentage of the total Welsh population receives disability living allowance.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not yet available separately for Wales.

Economically Inactive People

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in each *(a)* district and *(b)* county in Wales are economically inactive; and what is the total number of people in Wales who are economically inactive.

Mr. David Hunt: In the 1991 census the definition of economically inactive includes all those retired, permanently sick, students without a job in the week before the census and other inactive.

The information requested is given in the following table:

	Residents aged 16 or over economically inactive
Alyn and Deeside	21,547
Colwyn	22,437
Delyn	21,450
Glyndwr	14,539
Rhuddlan	21,874
Wrexham Maelor	38,075
CLWYD	139,922
Carmarthen	19,821
Ceredigion	23,709
Dinefwr	15,188
Llanelli	30,082
Preseli Pembrokeshire	24,482
South Pembrokeshire	15,489
DYFED	128,771
Blaenau Gwent	29,014
Islwyn	23,159
Monmouth	24,694
Newport	43,991
Torfaen	30,684
GWENT	151,542
Aberconwy	20,497
Arfon	18,598
Dwyfor	10,774
Meirionnydd	12,218
Ynys Mon—Isle of Anglesey	25,079
GWYNEDD	87,166
Cynon Valley	24,882
Merthyr Tydfil	22,448
Ogwr	46,664
Rhondda	31,673
Rhymney Valley	36,131
Taff-Ely	30,084
MID GLAMORGAN	191,882
Brecknock	14,572
Montgomeryshire	16,950
Radnor	8,158
POWYS	39,680
Cardiff	91,533
Vale of Glamorgan	36,785
SOUTH GLAMORGAN	128,318
Lliw Valley	22,645
Neath	24,865
Port Talbot	20,278
Swansea	67,136
WEST GLAMORGAN	134,924
TOTAL WALES	1,002,205

Training Schemes

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female 16 to 19-year-olds in Wales are on (i) employment training schemes or (ii) youth training schemes; and what is the proportion of 16 to 19-year-olds on those schemes as a percentage of the total Welsh population.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is not available in the form requested. A breakdown by male and female participation can be drawn from the 1991 census, which recorded residents who were on Government schemes but did not identify type of scheme. Based upon individual household members' assessments of their employment position there were 7,413 males and 4,250 females aged 16 to 19 on a Government scheme. The total of 11,663 represented 7·7 per cent. of the population of that age.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many residents of Derbyshire are claimants of *(a)* attendance allowance (i) at higher rate and (ii) at lower rate, *(b)* disability living allowance (Mobility) (i) at higher rate and (ii) at lower rate, *(c)* disability living allowance (care) (i) at higher rate, (ii) at middle rate and (iii) at lower rate, *(d)* disability working allowance and *(e)* family credit.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Automatic Credit Transfer)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list, by parliamentary constituency, the number of recipients of pensions and benefits paid through a *(a)* sub-post offices, *(b)* main post offices and *(c)* automatic credit transfer;

(2) what discussions he has had with representatives of banks and building societies about the transfer of benefits and pensions payments to automatic credit transfer; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how much his Department has budgeted during 1993-94 for research, piloting, changes to form design and to leaflets, and to other information available from the

Benefits Agency seeking to persuade recipients of pensions and benefits to switch to payment by automatic credit transfer; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Post Office Counters Ltd. and *(b)* trade unions representing post office workers about the transfer of benefits and pensions payments to automtic credit transfer; and if he will make a statement;

(5) pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *313*, on payment of benefits by automated credit transfer, whether he has estimated how many of the pension and benefit recipients currently paid through sub and main post offices hold bank or building society accounts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the uprating statement on 12 November proposals to extend the payment of benefits by automated credit transfer (ACT). Budgets for 1993-94 include £3·5 million to encourage existing customers to select payment by ACT. In 1991 it was estimated that of those paid through the Post Office, 65 per cent. held bank or building society accounts. Details, by parliamentary constituency, of the number of recipients of pensions and benefits paid through sub-post offices, main post offices and ACT are not available.

Officials have held discussions with representatives of banks and building societies regarding technical matters arising from the extension of ACT to other benefits, as announced in the citizens charter. Post Office Counters Ltd. was aware of our proposals to encourage the use of ACT. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has not met representatives of POCL or of post office workers, but he would consider positively any request for such a meeting.

Disabled People

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received from the National Federation of Housing Associations regarding plans by the Housing Agency to increase rents for disabled people living in housing association homes.

Mr. Burt: So far as I am aware, the Department has received no representations on this subject.

Regulations

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a list of all the regulations for which his Department is currently responsible, with a descriptive title for each individual regulation.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 8 February 1993, c. 499-500]:* "The Law Relating to Child Support" is available in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

83. **Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances European Community nationals may count periods of unemployment in which they were in receipt of benefit in another EC country towards the qualifying period of unemployment for eligibility for training for work, learning for work and the community action programme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A person must register with the employment service in this country as unemployed for at least 26 weeks in order to qualify for training for work. Detailed eligibility rules for learning for work and community action have yet to be finalised.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were on the employment training scheme in each month since April 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table:

Employment training number in training (Great Britain) April 1992 to March 1993

Month	*Number*
April	140,000
May	130,000
June	127,000
July	120,000
August	113,000
September	113,000
October	122,000
November	129,000
December	129,000
January	129,000
February	134,000
March	135,000

Source: Employment Service.
Footnote: Includes those with employed status.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people *(a)* entered and *(b)* left youth training in each month since April 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table:

Youth training (including youth credits) starts and leavers (Great Britain) April 1992 to February 1993

Month	*Starts*	*Leavers*
April	12,000	16,000
May	12,000	16,000
June	28,000	27,000
July	37,000	35,000
August	28,000	30,000
September	34,000	38,000
October	35,000	26,000
November	22,000	18,000
December	18,000	17,000
January	11,000	12,000
February	19,000	17,000

Source:
OSMOSIS, Scottish and Welsh Management Information Systems
Footnotes:
Figures are provisional

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people *(a)* entered and *(b)* left employment training in each month since 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table:

Employment Training
Starts and leavers (Great Britain)
April 1992 to February 1993

Month	*Starts*	*Leavers*
April	18,000	24,000
May	21,000	22,000
June	19,000	24,000
July	21,000	26,000
August	19,000	22,000
September	22,000	23,000
October	33,000	24,000
November	26,000	21,000
December	24,000	21,000
January	12,000	15,000
February	27,000	23,000

Source: OSMOSIS, Scottish and Welsh Management Information Systems.
Note: Figures are provisional.

European Social Affairs Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals were put forward by Her Majesty's Government, and what decisions taken, at the European Social Affairs Council meeting on unemployment, held in Nyborg on 3 and 4 May.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The European meeting held in Nyborg on 3 and 4 May was an informal meeting of EC Employment Ministers, not a Council meeting; I represented the United Kingdom. No decisions are taken at informal meetings of EC Ministers.

There were discussions about employment in the Community and the social dialogue between employers and trades unions at European level; in addition, the Commission presented its plans for preparing a Green Paper on social policy.

During the discussion on employment and the social dialogue, I stresed that Community action in the social affairs area needed to improve the working of the labour market and encourage the creation of jobs, and must not inhibit the competitiveness and flexibility of Community businesses. I also stated the Government's belief that Community resources, in particular the European social fund, should continue to be concentrated on programmes to help those at the greatest disadvantage in the labour market, especially the long-term unemployed.

In this discussion, UNICE—the main European employers' association—made it clear that its priority, too, was the restoration of Community competitiveness, given recent indications that the EC is falling behind in world markets, and called for the abandonment of EC measures which it considered would damage jobs, including a number in the field of employment and industrial relations law.

In accordance with the resolution adopted by the Council during the United Kingdom presidency, I expect that there will be a further discussion on employment and unemployment in the Community at the next Council meeting on 1 June. The Commission is likely to bring forward suggestions for the Council to consider then.

Unemployment Register

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people claiming unemployment benefit came off the register as a result of adjudication decisions and disallowances by type in each month from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about how many people came off the register as a result of adjudication decisions and disallowances by type in each month from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, I am not able to provide the information you have requested as not all clients notify my local offices of the reasons for stopping their claim. An adverse adjudication decision does not remove a person from the unemployed register. In certain circumstances, people whose claim for unemployment benefit is disallowed, continue to register as unemployed in order to receive other benefits such as Income Support and National Insurance contributions credits. If a person disagrees with an adjudication decision, they are advised to continue to register as unemployed to avoid the possibility of losing entitlement to benefit should their appeal to a Social Security Appeal Tribunal succeed.

Although information is not available in the format you requested, statistics on the volumes and types of adjudication decisions, nationally and by originating region, are collated and published quarterly. The reports, entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", have recently been revised to include the percentage of adverse decisions. At the time of writing, reports for the period up to and including September 1992 have been published and are available in the Library.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

As decided by the Administrative Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Fraudulent Claims

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many claimants have been deemed to have made fraudulent unemployment benefits claims in each month since May 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the number of fraudulently made claims to unemployment benefits. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, the information you requested is not available in the required format. However, I have provided below the quarterly figures of the number of people who have

voluntarily withdrawn their claims to benefit, or have started to declare part-time earnings not previously disclosed, as a direct result of an investigation by an Employment Service Inspector.

Quarterly periods	*Withdrawn/ modified claims*
1 April 1991 to 30 June 1991	12,451
1 July 1991 to 31 September 1991	13,351
1 October 1991 to 31 December 1991	12,528
1 January 1992 to 31 March 1992	14,691
1 April 1992 to 30 June 1992	17,747
1 July 1992 to 31 September 1992	18,555
1 October 1992 to 31 December 1992	15,150
1 January 1993 to 31 March 1993	12,259

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Redundancies

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies were declared in each month since May 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available information is given in the following table. Estimates from the labour force survey give the numbers of redundancies in the three months prior to each survey. The LFS moved from an annual to a quarterly survey in spring 1992.

	Redundancies
Spring 1991	388,000
Spring 1992	322,000
Summer 1992	278,000
Autumn 1992	310,000

Claimants (Job Offers)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployment benefit claimants have been deemed to have unreasonably turned down job offers in each month since May 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 11 May 1993.

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the number of unemployment benefit claimants deemed to have unreasonably turned down job offers in each month since May 1991. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information is not available on a monthly basis as requested but statistics are compiled quarterly. This information is available in a published document, the "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", under the heading Refusal of Employment. Copies of this document can be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Employment Service

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress the employment service has made in each quarter in meeting the targets outlined in the 1992-93 agency agreement; and what were the *(a)* total unemployed job placings against profiled target, *(b)* long-term unemployed job placings, *(c)* people with disabilities job placings, *(d)* inner-city job placings, *(e)* employment training referral to start ratio, *(f)* actual number and proportion of new claims not pursued following initial contact and *(g)* number of people who withdrew their claim to benefit after contact with fraud investigators, for each quarter.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am informed by the chief executive of the employment service that in the last quarter of 1992-93, ES placed a total of 324,400 unemployed people into jobs, bringing the total to 1,420,400 against an annual target of 1·425 million. Twenty-five per cent. of this quarter's placings were long-term claimants, 2·9 per cent. were people with disabilities and 35 per cent. were unemployed people in inner cities bringing the annual totals to 24 per cent., 2·8 per cent. and 34 per cent. against annual targets of 19 per cent., 2·5 per cent. and 36 per cent. respectively. The Employment Training/Employment Action referral to start ratio was 2·5:1, resulting in a total of 2·6:1 against an annual target of 2·5:1. New claims not pursued following initial contact in the final quarter were 107,798, 9 per cent. of initial inquiries, resulting in a total of 481,722 at the annual target level of 10 per cent. A total of 11,900 pepole withdrew their claim to benefit after contact with fraud investigators in the final quarter, bringing the total to 61,000 against an annual target of 58,000. For information on the employment service's performance for each of the first three quarters of 1992-93 I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave her on 28 October 1992, *Official Report*, columns *725-26*, and on 9 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *733-34*, and the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) on 16 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *185*.

Employment Action

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were participating in employment action in each month since April 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table:

Employment action
Participants receiving allowances (Great Britain)
April 1992 to March 1993

Month	*Number*
April	17,576
May	19,772
June	21,446
July	23,296
August	24,602
September	25,787
October	28,116
November	29,703
December	30,614
January	31,450

Month	Number
February	33,157
March	33,386

Source: Employment Service.

Restart

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployment benefit claimants have been placed on restart courses in each month since May 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about Restart Courses. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Restart Courses are short courses normally lasting for one week. They aim to help those people who have been unemployed for a long time and are having the most difficulty in getting back to work. They are not an alternative to regular job search or other employment or training programmes. Essentially, they provide people with the opportunity to explore all the options open to them and give them confidence to take the next step back to work.

Since 1990, people who have been unemployed for two years or more who refuse to take up a place on an Employment Department employment or training programme at their Restart interview, are asked to attend a Restart Course.

I have set out the information you have asked for in the table attached. You will see that we collect information about starters on Restart Courses on a quarterly basis. All those that attend Restart Courses are unemployed and claiming state benefit.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Starters and completers on restart courses April 1991 to March 1993

	1991-92 starters	1992-93 starters
April to June	38,651	26,440
July to September	36,805	28,577
October to December	29,229	32,300
January to March	29,155	37,388
Total	133,840	124,705

Labour Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of people in work in each month since May 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: The work force in employment is published on a quarterly basis only. The available information is as follows:

Workforce in employment in the United Kingdom seasonally adjusted

	(000's)
1991	
March	26,336
June	26,044
September	25,845
December	25,681
1992	
March	25,625
June	25,450
September	25,052
December	24,960

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people have been unemployed in Darlington in March, June, September and December in each of the last four years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Claimant unemployment figures by age are produced quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October, and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. These figures are not adjusted for seasonality.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what levels of *(a)* total, *(b)* male, *(c)* female and *(d)* 16 to 25 years, unemployment was identified by the 1991 census.

Mr. McLoughlin: The definition of unemployment used in the 1991 census of population differs from the claimant court definition and the internationally recognised ILO definition used in the labour force survey. It does not include an "actively seeking work" criterion. The information requested is as follows and relates to Great Britain:

	Number
(a) total:	2,484,509
(b) male:	1,710,891
(c) female:	773,618
(d) 16-24 years:	762,597

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many initial claimants of unemployment benefit were advised to claim other benefits instead in each month since April 1992; and what percentage of new claims this figure represents;

(2) how many initial claims for unemployment benefit there were in each month since April 1992; and how many were successful.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions about how many

initial claims for Unemployment Benefit there were in each month since April 1992 and how many were successful; and how many initial claimants were advised to claim other benefits instead and what percentage of new claims this figure represents. These are matters which fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency. As the questions you have asked are related, I have provided a table which incorporates both replies for ease of reference and clarity. I hope that this is acceptable.

The attached table shows, at Column 1, the total number of people who contacted my local offices in each calendar month since April 1992 with a view to making a new claim to Unemployment Benefit. Column 2 shows the actual number of new claims taken. The difference between the two figures represents claims which were not pursued. A claim not pursued occurs when a client decides, as a direct result of discussion with my local office people, not to pursue their claim for benefit. This may be for any of a wide variety of reasons; for example, my people may advise the clients that they do not appear to meet eligibility conditions. I should emphasise, however, our instructions are quite clear in stating that clients must never be told they cannot claim. A non pursuit case can only result from the client's own voluntary decision after the benefit conditions have been explained to them.

One of the reasons why a claim may not be pursued is that an adviser may identify that clients should be claiming a more appropriate benefit and advise them accordingly. Where appropriate, the adviser will contact other agencies, such as DSS, or help the client complete the necessary forms. Information on cases where the adviser has been actively involved in getting a client on to another benefit is collected centrally and is shown in column 3. This column only shows starts on other benefits. We do not hold information on how many clients are referred to an alternative benefit, but do not actually claim it.

The statistical months shown in the table can be either four or five weeks, which accounts for some of the fluctuations in them.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Month	*1. All possible claims (including claims not pursued)*	*2. Number of new claims taken*	*3. Starts on other benefits*	*4. Starts as per cent. of all possible claims*
April 1992	356,514	321,634	744	0·2
May 1992	396,732	358,263	878	0·2
June 1992	370,878	329,123	909	0·3
July 1992	567,830	513,225	1,030	0·2
August 1992	400,250	359,541	869	0·2
September 1992	417,249	375,308	879	0·2
October 1992	526,380	477,277	1,067	0·2
November 1992	420,699	381,278	1,066	0·3
December 1992	353,733	320,750	705	0·2
January 1993	496,192	450,316	1,223	0·3
February 1993	359,232	325,712	833	0·2
March 1993	335,962	307,560	742	0·2

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many initial claims for unemployment benefit were refused under the actively seeking work provisions in each month since April 1992; and what percentage of new claims this represents.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the number of initial claims for unemployment benefit that were refused under the actively seeking work provision in each month since April 1992 and what percentage of new claims this represents. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

This information is not available in the precise form requested. The information we collect in respect of adjudication activity refers to the total number of decisions given under each question and does not distinguish between initial claims and subsequent claims. These statistics are not available on a monthly basis, but are compiled quarterly. The information is available in a published document, the "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", under the heading of Actively Seeking Employment. Copies of this document can be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many initial claims for unemployment benefit were refused because of adjudication decisions and disallowances in each month since April 1992; if she will break down the figures by type of refusal; and if she will give the figures as a percentage of new claims.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 11 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the number of initial unemployment benefit claims disallowed monthly since April 1992. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

This information is not available in the form you have requested. The information we collect in respect of adjudication activity does not distinguish between decisions

given in respect of initial claims and those relating to subsequent claims. Adjudication statistics are not available on a monthly basis, as requested, but statistics are compiled quarterly. Information on the total number of decisions given, and the proportion disallowed, under each question is available in a published document, the "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Copies of this document can be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Employment, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for the Durham area for *(a)* average earnings, *(b)* average gross hourly earnings and *(c)* average weekly hours total for (i) all women, (ii) women part-time workers, (iii) women manual workers and (iv) women non-manual workers; and what are the comparable figures for men.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available information for employees in the county of Durham is contained in the following table:

Average gross earnings and hours of employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was not affected by absence for the survey pay period: April 1992

	Average weekly earnings £	*Average hourly earnings* £	*Average total hours* £
All employees			
Women	158·2	4·96	30·1
Manual women	117·3	4·04	29·9
Non-manual women	181·9	5·58	30·2
Men	293·7	6·99	41·4
Manual men	247·0	5·81	43·2
Non-manual men	347·4	8·90	38·8
Part-time employees			
Women	79·3	4·12	18·4
Men	..	..	..

Source: New Earnings Survey: April 1992.
Note: ".." denotes sample number too low or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 or 17-year-olds living in the Durham area are not in full-time education and *(a)* are on a youth training scheme or *(b)* are on a waiting list for a youth training scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are currently 791 young people from Durham city area on youth training, including a small number of 18-year-olds. Four 16 or 17-year-olds are presently on a waiting list for YT.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are being taken to ensure high standards of off-the-job education for youth training trainees.

Mr. McLoughlin: All youth training trainees have the opportunity to receive training which leads to an approved qualification at, or above, national vocational qualification level II—or, for young people who are endorsed as having special training needs, other appropriate outcomes. Each training and enterprise council is required to operate an effective quality assurance system for providers of off-the-job or on-the-job training.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds living in the Durham area have applied for youth training but not succeeded since 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: Figures show that since January 1990, 133 16 and 17-year-olds were submitted but did not start on youth training schemes in the Durham city area. Of these, 129 went into other training or education or found jobs. The destination of the remaining four young people is not known.

Private Residential Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information she has concerning levels of pay in the private residential care industry; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None; pay in the private sector is a matter for employers and employees.

Health and Safety Representatives

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to ensure that health and safety representatives are elected for each workplace; and if she will require employers to recognise such persons' rights and duties.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 allow recognised trade unions to appoint safety representatives, although in some cases the representatives are, in fact, elected. The regulations also give these safety representatives certain rights and duties. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, which is currently before the House, contains a provision to further strengthen these rights by protecting safety representatives against being dismissed for carrying out their health and safety duties. I have no other plans to change the current arrangements.

Low Pay

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what definition of low pay is in use by her Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no official definition of what constitutes low pay.

River Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps her Department is taking to publish an account of progress in the implementation of recommendations made after major disasters as recommended in the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive publish information about the implementation of such recommendations in various ways, including the Commission's annual report, other HSC/E publications and policy statements, and public conferences. In addition, progress is regularly reviewed, where appropriate, with the commission's industry advisory committees.

DEFENCE

Sandown Class Vessels

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to invite tenders for a further batch of Sandown class mine counter-measure vessels.

Mr. Aitken: We hope to be in a position to issue invitations to tender for a further batch of Sandown class single role minehunters before the summer recess.

United States (Aircraft Purchases)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the value to the United Kingdom, in pounds sterling, of the offset arrangements linked to the purchase from the United States of the E-3D AWACS Sentry aircraft.

Mr. Aitken: Boeing's performance against the AWACS offset requirement has been measured in United States dollars. Using an average exchange rate for the period in question, the value of contracts placed under the terms of the agreement is approximately £950 million.

Arms Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish figures showing the total value of the United Kingdom's arms exports for each year since 1986; and what was the value of arms export sales to third-world countries in those years.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 23 February, *Official Report*, columns *577-78*.

MOD Hospitals

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by country and region the Ministry of Defence hospitals in the United Kingdom which had consultant obstetric and/or general practitioner maternity beds in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with the numbers of beds of each type in each hospital in each year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Service hospital	*County*	*Region*	*Number of beds*[1]		
			1991[2]	*1992*[2]	*1993*[2]
Cambridge military hospital, Aldershot	Hampshire	Wessex	47	38	38
Princess Alexandra RAF hospital, Wroughton	Wiltshire	Wessex	16	25	—[3]
Princess Mary's RAF hospital, Halton	Bucks	Oxford	10	18	14

[1]Only obstetric maternity beds are to be found in service hospitals.
[2]As at 31 March of the year in question.
[3]Obstetric services ceased on 1 May 1992.

Empty Properties, Biggin Hill

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many residential properties are empty at Biggin Hill; and for how long they have been empty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 March 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, 81 service married quarters at Biggin Hill were empty as follows:

	Number
Under one year	54
Over one year	18
Over two years	9

Eight of these properties were allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly and the remaining 73 were in the process of being sold.

Air-to-surface Missiles

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement about the development of medium air-to-surface missiles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 20 April, *Official Report*, column 168.

Weapon Development Programmes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the international co-operative weapon development programmes the United Kingdom Government are engaged in, together with, in each case, the partner nation and the expenditure committed in 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the information contained in chapter 3, table 2 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992 (Cm 1981). The information on expenditure committed is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate time and cost.

Military Nuclear Sites

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the programmes, and the expenditure for them in 1992-93 and 1993-94, for *(a)* the clear-up of British military nuclear sites and materials and *(b)* participation in nuclear proliferation control efforts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department attaches great importance to any clear-up programmes necessary, and deals with each situation as it arises. Details of each case are classified.

The Government attach a high priority to pursuing effective measures to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. My Department is actively supporting the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in its efforts to seek an indefinite extension to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and is working to promote effective international controls on nuclear exports to help prevent proliferation. In order

to assist with the safe and secure dismantlement of nuclear weapons in Russia, we are providing the Russian Federation with nuclear weapons transport vehicles, and special containers. Expenditure on this programme for 1992-93 was some £1,500,000; we estimate that expenditure for 1993-94 will be around £15,000,000. A number of personnel within my Department work on nuclear non-proliferation related matters; their costs are not separately identifiable.

Helicopter Carrier

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), 29 March, *Official Report* column 16, whether he has now received full clarification from the tenderers of their bids for the amphibious helicopter carrier; when he expects his Department to complete the evaluation of bids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken *[pursuant to his answer, 23 April 1993, col. 241]:* I can now announce the results of the competition for the new helicopter carrier for the Royal Navy. Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd has won the competition by a very substantial margin of over £50 million. It will build the ship in conjunction with Kvaerner Govan on the Clyde. In reaching this decision, we took full account of wider factors such as the future of Swan Hunter Shipbuilders. The final judgment was made on our normal technical and value for money criteria.

This order demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving our amphibious capability and will provide our forces with a vessel suitable for a variety of operations. The ship will provide accommodation for helicopters, men, guns, land vehicles and other equipment and a platform from which to mount a helicopter assault. The ship will also significantly improve our ability to provide humanitarian assistance around the world.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 May 1993

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and publish the annual report of the Serious Fraud Office for the year 1992-93.

The Attorney-General: The annual report for the SFO for 1992-93 was laid before Parliament at 11 am today and then published. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

Reduced Child Fares

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to guarantee the reduced fares scheme for children following bus privatisation and deregulation in Greater London.

Mr. Norris: Bus privatisation will have no effect on the availability of child fares in London because bus operators will continue to provide services for London Transport, at the fares set by London Transport.

After deregulation, fares—including those for children—will be a matter for individual operators. However, we intend to extend to London local authorities the power already available to authorities outside London to offer travel concessions for children under 16 years, and school children under 18 years.

A21

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the way forward for the improvements to the A21 between Flimwell and Robertsbridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I am pleased to announce that the three programmed schemes in preparation along this stretch of A21 in East Sussex are being replaced by one comprehensive improvement between Flimwell and Robertsbridge. The improvement will include the Salehurst roundabout at Robertsbridge and the section of road between Flimwell and Hurst Green.

This announcement will be welcomed by the many local people and local authorities which made representations to me for a more strategic approach to the improvement of this length of the A21.

Railway Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications he has received from rail operators to provide international services over British Rail tracks under the Railway Regulations 1992.

Mr. Freeman: None. The channel tunnel is not yet open.

Rail Freight

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the procedures for ascertaining that the weight of freight per rail wagon does not exceed British Rail restrictions, and conforms with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Freeman: Primary responsibility rests with British Rail. The Health and Safety Executive does not set or check weight limits for wagons. The design, construction and designated use of wagons prevent them from being loaded beyond their maximum capacity.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the maximum weight of a wagon for the carriage of freight on the railways.

Mr. Freeman: The maximum axle weight is 25·5 tonnes. The largest freight wagons in normal use are mineral wagons and large oil tankers mounted on two bogies with two axles, which weigh 102 tonnes fully laden.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds he has given to the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Maclean: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), on 19 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *382*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the objects of the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Maclean: The directors of the Energy Saving Trust have set out the objects of the trust in a mission statement. This declares that the trust will encourage the efficient use of all forms of energy in the United Kingdom, leading to an overall reduction in total energy consumption and its consequent environmental impact. The trust will seek to sponsor initiatives that also provide long term economic benefits to the nation.

The trust aims to promote a broad awareness and understanding of the benefits of energy efficiency and conservation and will also promote training in energy-saving practices and technology.

Environmental Damage

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what notional additional environmental costs his Department assigns to *(a)* gas, *(b)* coal and *(c)* nuclear generation.

Mr. Maclean: The Department does not assign costs in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

A report recently produced by the Economic and Social Research Council-sponsored centre for social and economic research on the global environment for the Department of Trade and Industry on the social costs of

fuel cycles has produced some estimates of "externality adders". The numbers produced in this report should be seen as indicative rather than authoritative.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has had from Professor David Pearce on the problems of assigning money values to environmental damage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have sought no specific proposals. Professor Pearce is leading a team of researchers who have been commissioned by my Department to estimate the external, including environmental costs and benefits, of landfilling and of incinerating waste. I have referred to Professor Pearce's report of fuel cycle costs in reply to the previous question.

Loft Insulation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what study his Department has made of the reasons why people apply for grants to install insulation in their loft.

Mr. Maclean: We have made no study of the reasons why people apply for grants to install energy efficiency improvements. It is assumed that people do so in order to benefit from the increased energy efficiency which such improvements bring.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further information he has made available to local authorities about the standard Spending assessments for 1993-94.

Mr. Robin Squire: A publication "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1993-94" has been produced to provide details of the standard spending assessments (SSA) of each local authority. Copies have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies are being sent to every local authority in England and to the local authority associations.

EC Emissions Directives

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the occasions, in the last five months, when European directives on smoke, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and lead have been exceeded; where this has taken place; and if the information was released to the public.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The air quality standards in these directives are set on the basis of compliance with limit values over 12-month periods. The standards for nitrogen dioxide and lead were not breached in 1992. Data for smoke and sulphur dioxide for the period April 1992 to March 1993 are not yet available, but provisional figures indicate that these standards have also not been breached. The public can obtain information about air quality, based on measured concentrations of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and ozone, from daily bulletins on the Government's freephone 0800 556677, on CEEFAX page 404, on Teletext page 187 or from certain newspapers.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Children's Play

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made on discussing Sports Council funding for the national children's play and recreation unit; and what measures will be implemented to fund children's play after March 1993 pending the completion of these tasks.

Mr. Brooke *[pursuant to his reply 28 January 1993, Official Report, column 853]:* The Sports Council has now taken over the national play information centre and the play unit's work on playwork education and training along with seven of the unit's staff. An eighth officer will be employed on a consultancy basis. The Council's budget for play for 1993-94 is £300,000, which includes financial support for the four national centres for playwork education. In addition, the Sports Council's trust company has agreed to give a grant of £25,000 to the National Voluntary Council for Children's Play. I am delighted with these decisions which show the serious way in which the Sports Council is tackling its new responsibilities.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Emergency Planning

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what lessons his Department has drawn from the 1990-91 Gulf war for emergency planning of local authority involvement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Local authorities were involved in the planning for the reception of possible casualties arising from the 1990-91 Gulf conflict. The principal lesson learnt was the importance of involving local authorities in the making of such arrangements from as early a time as possible.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria were used in deciding future allocations of Home Office emergency planning grant aid to local authorities; and what consultations were undertaken with local authorities over the allocation;

(2) what plans he has to issue new guidelines to local authorities on the use of civil defence and emergency planning grant aid following the changes in international relations since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office wrote to the local authority associations and to individual local authorities in December 1992 to seek their views on a new method of distributing the total available civil defence grant to individual authorities.

We have proposed a system based on a formula reflecting the needs of the emergency planning process and, where appropriate, the number of districts in the county or metropolitan are concerned.

Comments have been received on these proposals and the proposed allocations for 1994-95 onward will be announced shortly.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultations have been

held since November 1989 regarding the length of the period of warning the civil defence system assumes for planning purposes before the outbreak of a major conflict in Europe; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment his Department has made since November 1989 of the threat to the United Kingdom from the use of chemical or biological weapons, in respect of civil defence issues.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The threat to the United Kingdom is kept under constant review. The process of integrated emergency management which is promoted by the Home Office calls for the development of plans based on the mitigation of effects and the continued delivery of service in an emergency, whatever the cause. Officials are considering the question of warning times within this context.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the period from November 1989 *(a)* the dates of, *(b)* the subjects discussed at and *(c)* attendances at any meetings Ministers have had with the relevant Ministers responsible for civil defence and emergency planning in other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No such meetings have taken place. Regular contact with other NATO countries on these subjects is maintained at official level.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to recruit qualified or experienced emergency planners to his Department *(a)* to replace the local authorities' adviser and *(b)* to oversee the use of civil defence and emergency planning grant aid.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no plans to replace the local authorities' adviser. Emphasis will be placed upon visits by Home Office officials to local authorities and regular meetings with the local authority associations.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect reorganisation of local government in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales will have on arrangements for grant-aided local authority emergency planning.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The precise effect of local government reorganisation on local authority grant-aided emergency planning arrangements will have to be determined area by area.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had since April 1992 over improving the responses of the emergency services to peace-time emergencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Part of the work of the civil emergencies adviser, Mr. David Brook, is to assist the emergency services in preparing their response to peace-time disasters. He is in regular contact with and has meetings with the emergency services, local authorities and others who have a role to play in preparing for and responding to disasters. In August 1992 the Home Office publication "Dealing with Disaster" was issued which contained guidance compiled by Mr. Brook aimed at assisting the provision of an effective response.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for the disposal of obsolescent message switch equipment installed at *(a)* regional Government headquarters, *(b)* United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation control centres and *(c)* local authority emergency centres; and if he will make a statement regarding the overall cost of installing, maintaining and disposing of the message switch equipment at these locations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The message switch equipment at the regional government headquarters and at the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation control centres was the subject of a combined rental and maintenance agreement with British Telecom. This agreement covered the repayment of capital cost, installation, maintenance and subsequent removal.

The total cost of the agreement over the 10-year period, during which the equipment was installed, amounted to just under £3·5 million in respect of equipment at regional government headquarters and £3·75 million in respect of equipment at the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation.

The message switch equipment, which was installed at local authority emergency centres, was purchased by the Home Office at a cost of £2·1 million including installation. Annual maintenance costs, in the final year, amounted to £1·5 million.

The total cost of the disposal of equipment installed at local authorities is estimated at £20,000. Where a local authority has indicated an interest in retaining a message switch network within its area, the Home Office has transferred ownership of the equipment to that authority with a proviso that it should not be resold.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding his Department is making available to *(a)* the BBC and *(b)* independent broadcasters in respect of his Department's proposals to rely on the broadcast media to issue national warnings of possible air attacks.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Precise costs will depend on the outcome of discussions which are now taking place with the BBC.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether local proposals to retain parts of the air-raid warning siren network for use in peacetime emergencies will be eligible for grant aid from his Department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals his Department has made for the future securing of a reserve fire-fighting capacity for use in time of war and national emergency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government continue to maintain a stockpile of emergency fire service appliances and equipment. Maintenance of the stockpile was contracted out to the private sector in 1991. The contract is for 10 years with a breakpoint after five.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table based on the 1992 reported crime figures showing the total number of crimes reported in each police authority area in 1992, and also showing these figures as a rate per 1,000 population in those areas and as a rate per uniformed officer in those areas.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is given in the table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police 1992 (1)
England and Wales

Police force area	*Offences per 1,000 population*	*Offences per police officer*
Avon and Somerset	122	55
Bedfordshire	110	51
Cambridgeshire	98	51
Cheshire	79	39
Cleveland	145	53
Cumbria	87	35
Derbyshire	89	45
Devon and Cornwall	76	38
Dorset	79	38
Durham	104	44
Essex	77	38
Gloucestershire	113	52
Greater Manchester	141	51
Hampshire	89	45
Hertfordshire	69	34
Humberside	147	61
Kent	102	49
Lancashire	83	35
Leicestershire	107	52
Lincolnshire	81	39
Merseyside	100	30
Metropolitan Police District(2)	124	31
Norfolk	89	46
Northamptonshire	101	48
Northumbria	142	56
North Yorkshire	73	37
Nottinghamshire	157	67
South Yorkshire	102	43
Staffordshire	93	44
Suffolk	68	35
Surrey	71	31
Sussex	83	39
Thames Valley	99	50
Warwickshire	92	44
West Mercia	72	37
West Midlands	123	45
West Yorkshire	145	58
Wiltshire	73	32
Dyfed-Powys	56	27
Gwent	89	39
North Wales	73	35
South Wales	125	51
Total	106	42

(1) Excluding criminal damage of value £20 and under.
(2) Including City of London.

Passport Agency

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what performance targets he has set for the United Kingdom Passport Agency in 1993-94.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: During 1993-94, I shall expect the Passport Agency to continue to provide a high standard of service to the public while seeking further efficiency savings in its operations.

I have set the agency the following key targets:

(i) to process properly completed straightforward applications within a maximum of 20 working days in the periods of peak demand between January and June, 15 working days in July and August, and 10 working days at other times,
(ii) to process such applications within an overall average of nine working days for the year as a whole, and
(iii) to reduce unit costs by a further 3 per cent. in real terms in comparison with the outturn for 1992-93.

The chief executive will remain directly accountable to me for the performance of the Passport Agency. An advisory board, including two private sector members with experience of delivery services to the public, will continue to provide me with an independent assessment of the agency's performance.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women of an ethnic minority background are serving as police officers in the Metropolitan police force as of 1 May.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There were 476 men and 147 women officers of an ethnic minority background.

Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to confer new duties or powers upon those fire and civil defence authorities other than the London FCDA.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Draft civil defence regulations were published last December and comments received are being considered. There are no plans to confer new duties or powers upon any of the fire and civil defence authorities.

Hosni E. Farhat

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the decision regarding the recommended minimum length of sentence to be served in the case of Hosni E. Farhat was made by the then Home Secretary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: It is assumed that by "recommended minimum length of sentence", the hon. Member refers to the punitive element of a discretionary life sentence which must be served to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence. This period was previously known as the "tariff".

Following advice from the trial judge and the then Lord Chief Justice, the Secretary of State decided in 1985 that the first review of Mr. Farhat's case by the parole board should take place after 17 years in custody. From that, Mr. Farhat will have concluded that the punitive element of his sentence was at least 20 years.

Under the transitional provisions in schedule 12 to the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Secretary of State issued a certificate to Mr. Farhat in August 1992 notifying him that the relevant part of his sentence—as the punitive element is now known—is 20 years.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the case of Hosni E. Farhat.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend and his predecessors have previously received a number of

representations alleging that Mr. Farhat was wrongfully convicted. These were fully considered but they brought to light no grounds for intervening in the case. Further representations have recently been received from Mr. Farhat and these are now being considered.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what review has been undertaken of the intelligence information relating to the case of Hosni E. Farhat.

Mr. Jack: I do not know what specific information the hon. Member has in mind, but in considering the latest representations about the safety of Mr. Farhat's conviction, my right hon. and learned Friend will take account of any relevant information which is available to him.

Attempted Murder

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons convicted of attempted murder left prison in each of the last five years; and what was the average length of detention in each year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, dated 10 May 1993:

PERSONS CONVICTED OF ATTEMPTED MURDER AND DISCHARGED WITHIN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of persons convicted of attempted murder who have been discharged from prison in each of the last five years. I am sorry to tell you that the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This is because in prison statistics prior to February 1991 attempted murder was recorded within the "other homicide" offence classification and not recorded separately. As a result, it would involve checking a large number of cases with prison service establishments.

The readily available information relates to the length of sentence imposed and is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", Supplementary tables volume 2 (tables S2.7 of the issue for 1991, Cm 2134), copies of which are held in the Library. A copy of the relevant page from the 1991 publication is attached.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the average recommended minimum length of sentence to be served in cases of attempted murder in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jack: On the assumption that the question relates to the punitive element—now known as the relevant part—of a discretionary life sentence imposed for attempted murder, the information is as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Actual or average punitive element (years)*
1979	1	15
1980	2	7·5
1981	4	12·9
1982	1	6
1983	1	10
1984	5	9·7
1985	1	10
1986	2	9·5
1987	4	13
1988	1	7
1989	2	8
1990	3	7·3
1991	3	8
1992	4	7·5

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals are currently serving sentences for attempted murder in United Kingdom prisons; and what is their average length of sentence.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, dated 10 May 1993:

FOREIGN CITIZENS SERVING SENTENCES FOR ATTEMPTED MURDER

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of foreign citizens currently serving sentences for attempted murder. The latest available provisional figures are for 28 February 1993. They show 23 foreign nationals serving sentences for attempted murder in prison service establishments in England and Wales. Of these 5 were serving life sentences. The lengths of sentence of those serving determinate sentences varied from 5 years up to 30 years; their average sentence was about 12·4 years.

Libyan Prisoners

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Libyan citizens are *(a)* currently serving sentences and *(b)* awaiting sentencing in United Kingdom prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, dated 10 May 1993:

LIBYAN CITIZENS IN PRISON SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of Libyan citizens currently serving sentences and the numbers on remand. The latest available provisional figures are for 28 February 1993. They show that eight prisoners serving sentences in prison service establishments in England and Wales had their nationality recorded as Libyan. There were no remand prisoners recorded as having Libyan nationality.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that people coming from overseas to do domestic service work in Britain are given the right to change employers and other rights enjoyed by similar workers recruited in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Each case involving a domestic worker who wishes to remain in the United Kingdom after having left his or her employer is carefully considered

before any enforcement action is taken, and account is taken of any compassionate circumstances. Domestic workers are entitled to the protection of our criminal and employment law.

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the relationship between the level and nature of his Department's support for youth work and the change in the level of juvenile crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: No such assessment has been made. Except for certain projects which are supported under the safer cities initiative, the Home Office does not directly fund youth work; but the Home Office research and planning unit is currently involved in an evaluation of a number of local projects which have deliberately targeted young people at risk of offending.

PRIME MINISTER

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have been made to ensure co-ordination between Government Departments on non-fossil fuel obligation 3.

The Prime Minister: The responsibility for making orders imposing a non-fossil fuel obligation on public electricity suppliers in England and Wales lies with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. He consults other Ministers as appropriate.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Bank Loans (Small Businesses)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to encourage the banks to increase their loans to the small businesses sector for capital investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced proposals to improve the small firms loan guarantee scheme in his Budget on 16 March. The changes will take effect on 1 July.

Council Tax

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by district council in Nottinghamshire the number of appeals presently notified to valuation officers by property owners against council tax bandings; and how long he expects it to take for these appeals to be dealt with.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* As at 6 May, some 5,398 appeals have been made by taxpayers in Nottinghamshire, against their council tax bandings. Of these 277 are in Ashfield, 453 in Bassetlaw, 327 in Mansfield and 685 in Newark and Sherwood. The remaining 3,656 are in Broxtowe, Gedling, Nottingham and Rushcliffe for which individual statistics are not yet available.

As the total number of appeals which will be made in Nottinghamshire cannot yet be predicted, it is not possible to determine the length of time it will take to deal with these appeals.

Company Cars

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *379*, if he will list the circumstances when home-to-work travel in a car made available by an employer is not regarded as private use.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* Home-to-work travel in a car made available by an employer is not regarded as private use:

where the employee has a travelling appointment;
where the employee travels from home to a temporary place of work and the distance travelled is less than the distance between the normal place of work and the temporary place of work;
where, exceptionally, the home qualifies under tax law as a place of work and the employee travels from home to another place of work in the performance of his duties.

There are also circumstances where home-to-work travel in a car provided by an employer is regarded as private use but is ignored for tax purposes. These are:

where a disabled person is provided with a car from home-to-work travel and there is no other private use;
where a car is provided for home-to-work travel when public transport is disrupted;
where a car is provided for late night journeys from work-to-home, within the terms of Inland Revenue extra-statutory concession A66;
where the car is a pooled car and any home-to-work travel is merely incidental to its business use.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* general receptionists and *(b)* telephone receptionists are employed within each of his Department's offices; and how many are Welsh speaking.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The numbers of reception staff employed by the Department are:

	Number
Receptionists	
Gwydyr House	2
Cathays Park	3
Telephonist and Receptionists	
Brunel House (Cadw)	1
Trawsgoed	2
Caernarfon	2
Llandrindod Wells	1
Carmarthen	2
Colwyn Bay	1

Those at Trawsgoed and Caernarfon are Welsh speaking.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to place all public advertisements produced by his Department either *(a)* bilingually in the Welsh language and English language or *(b)* in the Welsh language only.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department is fully committed to providing for the needs of Welsh speakers and English speakers alike. As a matter of policy, all official notices appear bilingually, and it is the Department's objective that public advertisements should be bilingual.

Holiday Play Schemes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what competitive tendering procedures were used for the selection of Acorn Nursery as provider of holiday play schemes for children of Welsh Office staff; what financial evaluation was made of competing bids; what consultation with different grades of staff was carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office holiday play scheme contract was advertised in the local press. Tenders were evaluated on the basis of the cost benefit to the Department and the value for money to parents—who meet the major part of the cost. Two tenderers came within the Department's cost limit and satisfied its quality criterion. They were interviewed.

As the cost benefit to the Welsh Office was the same with either provider, consultations took place with a representative sample of users in a range of grades including junior clerical grades. Staff were unanimous in preferring the Acorn bid and the selection was made on that basis.

Child care forms an important part of my Department's policy to promote equality of opportunity, help staff combine a career and family responsibilities, and maximise the contribution of skilled and experienced staff.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he intends to take to encourage people with disabilities to become teachers, nursery nurses or teachers' aides.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The teaching as a career unit, funded by the Welsh Office and the Department for Education (DFE), promotes and publicises teaching. It has not undertaken any special targeting of the disabled.

The DFE is in consultation with disabled teachers' interest groups prior to the revision of its circular 1/88 "Physical and Mental Fitness to Teach of Teachers and of Entrants to Teacher Training". This will continue to stress that disability in itself does not mean that a person is medically unfit to teach, but that the paramount consideration should be the health and welfare of pupils.

EC Funding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Offical Report*, column *412*, if he will specify what the projects in the Betws and Taff Merthyr areas are; and what was the commencement date of those projects.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Project	*Start Date*
Betws Catchment Area	
Pontardawe Access Improvements	May 1992
Innter Link Road Ammanford (Phase I)	January 1991
Block B, Capel Hedre Industrial Estate	January 1993
Environmental Improvements, Meadows Road, Cross Hands	March 1991
Cross Hands Business Park Workshop Units	March 1993
Cross Hands Business Park Landscaping	February 1992
Taff Merthyr Catchment Area	
Trelewis Community Centre	February 1991
Cwm Cynon (South) Infrastructure	December 1992
Nixons Institute Mountain Ash	April 1993
Cwm Cynon Business Centre	December 1992
Penrhiwceiber Colliery Leisure Facility	June 1992
Deep Duffryn Colliery Leisure Facility	August 1992

Salmon

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken to protect and enhance the number of spring salmon that are entering Welsh rivers.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The National Rivers Authority is proposing new byelaws designed to improve spring salmon runs on the Dee, Wye and the Usk.

Children Leaving Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children and young people under the age of 17 years have left care in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many of them *(a)* left school with no qualifications, *(b)* remain unemployed, *(c)* are currently estimated to be sleeping rough and *(d)* are in goal or other corrective institutions.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not held centrally.

Denbighshire

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the representations he has received in regard to the inclusion of the communities of Nercwys, Nannerch, Gwernymynydd, Gwernaffield, Cilcain, Mostyn, Halkyn, Whitford, Brynford, Trelawnydd and Gwaerysgor, Llanasa, Ysaefivy and Cherwys in the proposed Denbighshire authority following the publication of his local government White Paper.

Mr. David Hunt: Since publishing my White Paper on 1 March 1993, I have received 42 written representations regarding the inclusion of these communities within the proposed unitary authority for Denbighshire.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Krypton Gas

Ms Jowell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of the results of research commissioned since 1978 *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. on the possible health effects of the discharge of krypton gas into the environment.

Mr. Eggar: Neither the Department of Trade and Industry nor its predecessor, the Department of Energy, has commissioned research into the possible health effects of krypton gas. Questions about any research commissioned by British Nuclear Fuels plc are matters for the company.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of the members of the board of BNFL and state which of them have a management role or a business interest in Touche Ross.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc. Appropriate information on the directors of the company is given in BNFL's report and accounts, copies of which are placed in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which publications in other European countries advertisements have been placed by Government Departments in the current financial year promoting inward investment into the United Kingdom; what was the cost of the advertisements; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Sainsbury: During the 1992-93 financial year the Department of Trade and Industry spent £190,000 on advertisements in Europe promoting inward investment into the United Kingdom. In Germany advertisements were placed in *Hadelsblatt*, *Top Business* and *Wirtschaftswoche*, together with chamber of commerce magazines in Freiburg, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Reutlingen, while in Switzerland advertisements appeared in *Bilanz*, *Basler Zeitung* and *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*. The 1993-94 campaign has yet to be commissioned.

Copies of the advertisements have been placed in the Library.

Hydrocarbons Programme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans he has to allow overseas counterparts of the British Geological Survey to bid for responsibility for United Kingdom oil and gas archives or to undertake surveys;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *336*, which types of organisations in the United Kingdom he has identified as potentially suited to the work under the hydrocarbons programme mentioned in his answer.

Mr. Eggar: In considering which organisations may be invited to submit competitive bids for work under the hydrocarbons programme, the Department is taking account of the requirements of the relevant legislation and commercial sensitivity.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the work of the Renewable Energy Advisory Research Group.

Mr. Eggar: In December 1992 the report of the renewable energy advisory group to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was published. The report's findings will be taken into account in the Government's renewable energy strategy document due to be published later this year.

Manufactured Exports

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken to ensure that British exports of manufactured goods to the United States of America do not face tariffs.

Mr. Needham: My Department takes every opportunity to press the United States and other countries to reduce existing tariff barriers and to oppose the introduction of new ones, both in general terms in the context of the general agreement of tariffs and trade and in instances of specific concern. For example, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear our strong opposition to the US auto industry's request that the US Treasury reclassifies sports utility vehicles as trucks to secure massive added tariff protection to the detriment of our Land Rover exports. We also support the EC in its efforts to seek an all-round tariff reduction in the Uruguay round negotiations.

THORP

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the specific products and by-products of thermal oxide reprocessing at Sellafield, with their respective levels and life of radioactivity, and volume produce; and if he will indicate the proposed purpose or use of each of these products and by-products.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield will recover uranium and plutonium from spent nuclear fuel. These materials can be recycled in civil power stations. British Nuclear Fuels plc expects that over 6,000 tonnes of uranium and some 40 to 50 tonnes of plutonium will be separated during the first 10 years of THORP's operation.

Following recovery of the uranium and plutonium, the residue, amounting to around 3 per cent. by weight, consists of waste. The long-term radiological content of the waste is lower than that of the spent fuel because the uranium and plutonium have been removed. For the estimated volumes of wastes involved and details of their contents, I refer the hon. Member to the 1991 United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Work Permits

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits for overseas workers have been granted in each year since 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of work permits issued by the Department since 1987 is as follows:

Year	*Number of work permits issued*
1987	26,965
1988	33,021
1989	37,865
1990	43,619
1991	37,989
1992	37,917

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the top 10 countries whose citizens received work permits to pursue employment in Britain in 1992; and if she will give the number of applications accepted from each of these countries.

Mr. McLoughlin: The top 10 countries whose citizens received work permits in 1992 and the number of applications approved are given in the table:

Country	*Work permits approved*
USA	11,617
Japan	2,030
India	1,660
Australia	1,067
Canada	916
Sweden	568
South Africa	472
Peoples Republic of China	458
Poland	374
USSR	356

These figures do not include permits issued under the training and work experience scheme.

Employment, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information her Department has on how many women in the Durham area have initiated legal challenges against their employers since 1990 on the grounds on sexual offences, and on the results of such cases.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information is held on how many people living in the Durham area have been denied unemployment benefit since 1990 because they are not available for work because they have an adult or child to care for during working hours.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 12 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question requesting information on how many people living in the Durham area have been denied unemployment benefit since 1990 because they are not available for work because they have an adult or child to care for during working hours. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, the information is not available in the form you have requested and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Statistics on the number of people whose claims for unemployment benefit have been disallowed because they are not available for work do not identify, separately, the number of people disallowed because they have caring responsibilities.

Adjudication statistics are compiled quarterly, for each Employment Service Region, and published in the "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Information about claims disallowed because people are not available for work for any reason are recorded under the heading of "Availability". The figures for Durham are contained in the statistical return for Northern Region. Copies of this document can be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current number of job vacancies in the Durham area.

Mr. McLoughlin: In March 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, the number, not seasonally adjusted, of unfilled vacancies at the jobcentre which covers the city of Durham was 229. Jobcentre vacancies do not represent the total number of vacancies available.

Electrical Equipment

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislation would be necessary and what legislation would need to be amended to privatise *(a)* the Electrical Equipment Certification Service and *(b)* any other part of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Primary legislation would be needed in either case.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Current Affairs Survey

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the most recent *(a)* national and *(b)* international circulation of the Central Office of Information publication "Current Affairs—A Monthly Survey"; what benefits accrued to the United Kingdom from its publication; and for what reasons its publication is being stopped.

Mr. Waldegrave: The most recent circulation figure for "Current Affairs—A Monthly Survey" was 714 copies. About three-quarters went to United Kingdom addresses. The publication was designed to enable readers of the annual "Britain Handbook" to be kept up to date with developments in British affairs.

Efforts to increase circulation have not been successful and production costs outweigh income from subscriptions.

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much money has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the Medical Research Council since 1988 for AIDS and HIV research.

Mr. Waldegrave: Between the years 1988-89 and 1992-93, Her Majesty's Government have allocated £68 million to the Medical Research Council for AIDS and HIV research.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library details of all Medical Research Council grants for HIV and AIDS research, together with the published and completed papers presented to the Medical Research Council as a consequence of this grant-aided work.

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of research grants supported by the MRC through its strategic and directed programmes have been placed in the Library. A list of published and completed papers could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Research Scientists (Shares)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce legislation to bar medical research scientists from holding shares in drugs companies whose products they are researching.

Mr. Robert Jackson: No. I can see no need to introduce legislation aimed specifically at medical research scientists. The Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985 already restricts improper share dealing by a company's employees or by public servants. The Criminal Justice Bill, which is progressing through the House and will replace the existing legislation, contains provisions with a similar effect. Holdings of shares may also be subject to further restrictions under a scientist's terms of employment or contract.

HEALTH

AZT

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the present clinical criteria for having AIDS; what were the clinical criteria for having AIDS in 1987; how those criteria have changed; and what effect the criteria have on eligibility of patients to be prescribed AZT.

Dr. Mawhinney: In the United Kingdom, the current clinical criteria for AIDS are those set out by the US Centers for Disease Control in 1987. Copies will be placed in the Library. The 1987 AIDS case definition revised the 1985 definition by addition of non-infectious, non-cancerous HIV-associated conditions and by widening the diagnostic critieria for certain AIDS indicator diseases.

Zidovudine, or, AZT, is currently licensed in the United Kingdom for the following indications:

asymptomatic disease in adult patients showing signs of immune suppression, i.e., CD4 counts repeatedly below 200 per cumm or between 500 and 200 and falling rapidly

early symptomatic HIV disease in adults with CD4 counts below 500 per cumm

advanced disease, i.e., AIDS and AIDS Related Complex, in adults and children

HIV related symptons or asymptomatic disease with markers indicating significant HIV-related immune suppression in children over the age of three months.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* civil servants within her Department, *(b)* consultants sitting upon any of the advisory committees since 1977 or *(c)* other individuals involved organisationally in the Concorde trials have received money in royalties or grants, or had career positions, or directorships or consultancies, with the Wellcome Foundation, the Wellcome Trust or any of the Wellcome Foundation's subsidiary companies.

Dr Mawhinney: No civil servants within the Department have received money in any form from the Wellcome Foundation or the Wellcome Trust. Membership of the Committee on Safety of Medicines is published in the Medicines Commission annual report, which includes a comprehensive list of members' interests in the pharmaceutical industry. Information is not available for outside experts who sit on other Departmental advisory committees. The Concorde trial was organised by the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library the full results of the Concorde trials; and if she will make a statement on the results.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The full report of the trial is still in preparation and is due to be published within the next few months. A copy of the letter to *The Lancet* summarising the preliminary results is available in the Library.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health is she will place in the Library all the relevant research data prior to the start of the Concorde trials in 1988, which showed that AZT was of benefit to HIV antibody positive asymptomatic individuals.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

Prior to the start of the Concorde trial one paper had been published which indicated a potential benefit of AZT treatment in asymptomatic HIV-infected individuals, and this reported data on a very small number of subjects. A copy is available in the Library. (Lancet (i) 1988: pages 373-376).

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are being made for those Concorde trial subjects who were given the drug AZT: how many are still being prescribed the drug; and who is bearing the cost.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

All patients in the Concorde trial will have the opportunity to discuss their future treatment with their doctors in the light of the results of the trial and their own clinical status and will be told whether they received AZT or placebo during the blinded phase of the trial, if they wish to know. For those deciding to continue treatment with AZT and who fall within the currently licensed indications, the cost of the drug will be met by the national health service. There is no information available on the number of patients still being prescribed the drug.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Concorde trials relating to AZT were completed; when the results were announced; and if she will make a statement about the way in which the preliminary results were announced.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

Analysis of the data from the Concorde trial collected up to 31 December 1992 was completed in March 1993; limited follow-up information will continue to be collected on the patients, in an unblinded fashion, so the trial is not completely finished. Preliminary results were published in a letter to *The Lancet* on 2 April 1993, having been announced to doctors and other staff involved with the trials at participating clinical centres at a meeting on 1 April 1993. The trial co-ordinating committee considered it important for the key data to be made available to an international readership in a preliminary report through the scientific press as soon as possible, to avoid the spread of inaccurate rumours among patients and their doctors.

Pegasus Drug Abuse Project

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current state of plans for the Pegasus drug abuse project proposed by the North East Thames regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: An application for funding for the Pegasus project proposal was considered recently by North East Thames regional health authority and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Sir William Staveley, for details. An application was also made to the Department of Health by the Association for the Prevention of Addiction under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. This was unsuccessful.

Children in Care

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that children who might abscond while in care are properly escorted while outside the home.

Mr. Yeo: Advice on physical intervention to prevent a detained child from running away from an open children's home, or while being escorted outside a secure accommodation care unit, is included in the guidance on permissible forms of control in children's residential care published by the Department on 28 April 1993. It is the responsibility of management to interpret this guidance and develop policies and procedures within which to operate. A copy of the guidance is available in the Library.

Back Pain

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the report from her Department's clinical standards advisory committee inquiry into back pain; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The group expects to report in the summer of 1994 to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Clinical standards advisory group reports are normally published along with a Government response within three months of receipt.

Male Circumcision

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of male circumcision operations in the last 15 years for which figures are available; and what was the cost of comparable operations in the private sector.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each district health authority within the Mersey region the total number of *(a)* general practitioners and medical practices and *(b)* general practitioners and medical practices that are fund holders.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table.

FHSA	*Number of GPs*	*Number of medical practices*	*Number of fundholding practices*	*Number of fundholding GPs*
Cheshire	512	143	47	236
Liverpool	240	104	18	54
St. Helens and Knowsley	176	76	12	40
Sefton	141	55	13	52
Wirral	178	68	11	41
Total for Mersey RHA	1,247	446	101	423

Information on GP numbers is collected by family health services authorities; the data are for 1 October 1992. Fundholding figures are for 30 April 1993.

Complaints (Evidence)

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *169*, what action she takes to ensure that evidence presented to her by the Medical Advisory Committee is complete; and by what process a complainant may raise objections to the material before the committee.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Medical Advisory Committee gives advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on any penalty which should be imposed on a general practitioner who has been found in breach of his terms of service. There is no provision under the regulations for the involvement of the complainant in this consideration.

Drugs

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *169*, how many of the preparations listed as drugs acting on the skin *(a)* do not require a product licence under the Medicines Act 1968, *(b)* are available for purchase without a doctor's prescription at pharmacies and other retail outlets and *(c)* attracted fewer than 20 prescriptions a year met by the NHS in each of the years 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of products within this list which attracted fewer than 20 prescriptions was 788 in 1991 and 822 in 1992; figures for 1990 are not available. The remaining information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Health Centres

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to announce the results of the working group on the financing of health centres.

Dr. Mawhinney: We intend to announce the results, and our proposals, shortly.

Dementia

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether dementia is included within the ambit of the specific grant for mental illness.

Mr. Yeo: Yes.

Home Care Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to bring forward legislation to enforce the registration and inspection of private individual home care services.

Mr. Yeo: We have no plans to do so.

Junior Doctors

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give average figures for *(a)* hours contracted, *(b)* duty hours and *(c)* hours on feet of junior hospital doctors in each year since 1971.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on the average contracted hours of junior hospital doctors and dentists, at 30 September for each year, is as follows:

	Hours
1971-1975	Not available
1976	92
1977	91
1978	90
1979	90
1980	89
1981	89
1982	88
1983	87
1984	86
1985	85
1986	85
1987	82
1988	81
1989	81
1990	79
1991	79
1992	Not yet available

Information on duty hours and on "hours on feet" is not available centrally.

NHS Management Review

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will announce the terms of reference and membership of the NHS management functions and manpower review; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The continuing development of the national health service reforms requires the structure of the NHS above the level of local purchasers and providers to be examined. I have set up a review to consider what management processes and organisational structures will best deliver measurable improvements in health and effective and efficient services, through the operation of the NHS internal market, while minimising management costs and ensuring proper public accountability. I have asked the review team to complete its work in July.

The review team's terms of reference are as follows:

1. To carry out an organisational analysis of the main work and functions required to:
   - Ensure that the Government's reforms of the NHS are fully effected.
   - Ensure effective oversight of purchasers and providers operating in the NHS internal market.
   - Ensure that the Secretary of State is able to discharge her statutory responsibilities for the management of the NHS.
   - Ensure that the proportion of NHS expenditure devoted to direct patient care is maximised.
2. In the light of the above:
   - To determine the statutory responsibilities and the core functions which must continue to be discharged by bodies which are part of, or directly accountable to, central Government.
   - To make recommendations on the organisational structure required for this.
   - To consider possible future changes to the configuration of NHS purchasers—including DHA mergers, joint DHA/FHSA working and the development of the GP Fundholding scheme.
   - To make recommendations on the discharge of other essential functions, e.g., Estates Management and Information Management and Technology.
   - To determine the financial and manpower consequences, for the NHS and the Department of Health (including the NHSME), of conclusions reached.
3. The review team should take particular account of:
   - The need to achieve a balance between the benefits of decentralisation and the essential requirements of public accountability.
   - The need for an internally consistent regulatory framework to support the operation and development of the internal market.
   - The need for the development of effective purchasing in the NHS.
   - The conclusions of the Cadbury Report on corporate governance.

Ms Kate Jenkins, a member of the NHS policy board, will chair the review's steering group and lead the review team itself. The other members of the review team are:

Mr. Alan Langlands—(Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Management Executive)

Mr. Peter Griffiths—(Formerly Chief Executive, Guy's NHS Trust)

Mr. Ian Carruthers—(Chief Executive, Dorset Health Commission)

Mr. John Sherring—(Regional Director—West Midlands, Audit Commission)

Dr. Carol Propper—(NHS Management Executive on secondment from University of Bristol)

Members of the review team providing professional advice on specific areas are:

Professor Andrew Pettigrew—(Centre for Corporate Strategy and Change, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick)

Dr. Graham Winyard—(Medical Director, NHS Management Executive)

Mrs. Sue Williams—(Deputy Director of Nursing, NHS Management Executive)

Other sources of professional advice will be identified as necessary.

Clinical Services

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's policy on the use, by health authorities or trusts, when all other clinical indicators are equal, of age as a criterion for access to clinical services.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the responsibility of clinicians to establish the need for and priority of medical treatment.

SCOTLAND

Piers

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, columns *538-39*, if he will give a full breakdown of the cost of adapting the piers at Kennacraig, Port Ellen and Port Askaig per agency involved in the project.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The breakdown of the estimated cost of adapting the piers at Kennacraig, Port Ellen and Port Askaig by source of funding is as follows:

	Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd.	*Scottish Office*	*European Regional Development Fund*
Kennacraig	299,000	161,000	120,000
Port Ellen	10,000	—	—
Port Askaig	70,000	—	—
	379,000	161,000	120,000

Council House Sales

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 March, *Official Report*, column *383*, if he will now make a statement on the evidence that he has received from East Lothian district council on 18 February, and also on 26 April, about abuses of the right to buy council houses with discounts; and if he will introduce amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 to prevent such abuses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has considered the information provided by East Lothian district council about certain right-to-buy sales in East Lothian. Our conclusion on the basis of this information is that it does not appear that anything has happened which is contrary to the right-to-buy provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

Tenants who are buying their homes should be free to make whatever financial arrangements they think desirable to suit their particular circumstances. A tenant who has bought a house is also free to dispose of it as he or she wishes, subject to the provisions for the repayment of discount if the disposal takes place within three years. We do not propose to amend the legislation to constrain these freedoms.

It is important that tenants should understand the financial implications of any agreement they might enter into. It is advisable for tenants to take independent legal advice before entering into any agreement, and we will emphasise this in revising the leaflet "Buy Your Home" later this year.

Forestry

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 April, *Official Report*, columns *89-90*, if he will give biographical details of the members of the forestry review group.

Sir Hector Monro: All the members of the forestry review group are serving civil servants and have responsibilities, knowledge and experience, relevant to its remit and work. I see no benefit in publishing further biographical details.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the work of the forestry review group does not jeopardise the Forestry Commission's existing policy and practice of allowing free public access to its land.

Sir Hector Monro: The remit of the forestry review group expressly includes the request that it should make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies.

Such objectives and policies clearly include the Forestry Commission's practice of encouraging public access to woodlands as stated in its "Forestry Policy for Great Britain", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individual Forestry Commission land holdings there are.

Sir Hector Monro: It is estimated that there are about 5,000 individual Forestry Commission land holdings, excluding individual housing plots and other small areas.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the total amount of public expenditure generated since 1981 by former Forestry Commission land passing into the private sector and becoming eligible for agricultural grants and subsidies.

Sir Hector Monro: The amount of public expenditure generated in these circumstances has been negligible.

Woodlands sold by the commission are rarely converted to agricultural use as, under the felling licensing procedures, there is a general presumption against this. Existing agricultural land sold by the commission will normally have been attracting agricultural grants and subsidies before sale.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the total area of land disposed of, *(b)* the number of individual sales, *(c)* the income generated by the sales, *(d)* the total area of land disposed of over which public access has been formally protected and *(e)* the number of individual access agreements made on land disposed of, regarding land disposed of by the Forestry Commission since 1981.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* Between 27 July 1981 and 31 March 1993, the Forestry Commission sold 173,000 hectares of land, including woodlands and other land such as agricultural land and residential properties.

The sales included over 2,000 individual areas of forest land which are identified in lists held in the Library of the House; no central record is kept of the number of sales of agricultural land and residential properties.

The total income from all sales was £174 million.

The arrangements for securing continued public access to commission woodlands after sale, by way of prior agreements entered into between the Commission and local authorities, were introduced in October 1991. Most of the sales concluded since then were too far advanced in October 1991 to be considered for an access agreement, while most of the areas brought forward for disposal since that date have still to be sold. Access agreements have now been made with local authorities for five areas of commission land, one of which, covering 21 hectares, has been sold.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 April, *Official Report*, columns *89-90*, what steps he has taken, or proposes to take, to publicise the name and address of the secretary to the forestry review group; and if he intends to encourage or invite the submission of expert evidence to the group from outside.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* Many individuals and organisations have already submitted useful comments and thoughts to the secretary to the forestry review group, whose name and address have been given coverage in the *Official Report* and the media.

Further submissions will continue to be welcomed and, as the work of the group progresses, there may be issues on which specific comment is invited; publicity will be arranged for these, as appropriate.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, columns *276-78*, to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), if he will place in the Library a list by county and region of Forestry Commission land holdings greater than 1,000 hectares, giving the name, location and area.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 21 April 1993]:* The Forestry Commission is preparing a list of its landholdings greater than 1,000 hectares and I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a copy as soon as possible and for further copies to be placed in the Library.

Cockburnspath Bypass

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the Strathclyde university study monitoring the wind levels over the newly constructed Cockburnspath bypass; and if he will make it his policy to publish the results when they are known in full.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The report of the Strathclyde university study of wind speeds on the new Cockburnspath bypass is expected to be submitted by the end of this year. The results will be made public.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for diversion of vehicles from the route of the newly constructed Cockburnspath bypass during abnormally high wind conditions; and what alternative roads would be used in any such diversion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* In common with other exposed section of trunk road, the embankment section of the new Cockburnspath bypass now has signs warning drivers of high-sided vehicles of the danger of crosswinds. A comparative study of the pattern of wind speeds and directions at this location and the nearby section of A1 at Thorntonloch is being undertaken by Strathclyde university and the results will determine a strategy for the use of automatically triggered diversion signs. In the event of their use, the diversion route will be along the former trunk road through Cockburnspath.

A1

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the currently identified parts of the A1 between Newcastle and Edinburgh which are identified as being subjected to abnormally high winds; and what the wind velocities are in such cases.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Sections of the A1 between Newcastle and Edinburgh which have been identified and signed as being subject to abnormal winds which can cause difficulties for drivers of high sided vehicles are:

(a) River Coquet Bridge, Felton Bypass;
(b) River Tweed Crossing, Berwick Bypass;
(c) Cockburnspath Bypass;
(d) Thorntonloch, north of Dunglass; and
(e) Dunbar Bypass.

The study of wind speed at Cockburnspath and Thorntonloch is ongoing and meaningful results are not yet available. Wind velocities have not been measured at the other locations.

Appointments

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the Scottish Tourist Board, the Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Sports Council the names of the chairman and board or council members, their occupation or profession and the allowances and remuneration payable in each case.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The information requested is given in the tables.

Scottish Tourist Board

Name	*Occupation*	*Annual Remuneration £*
Chairman		
Ian Grant CBE FRAgs	Farmer	34,510

Name	Occupation	Annual Remuneration £
Board Members (6)[1]		
Ian Milton	Managing Director	6,320
David D Stevenson CBE	Chairman and Managing Director	6,320
John F Loughray	Company Director	6,320
Scott Grier	Managing Director	6,320
Mrs. Philippa Grant	Company Director	6,320

[1] One vacancy at present.

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

Name	Occupation	Annual Remuneration £
Chairman		
Professor Jack Shaw, CBE	Deputy Governor, Bank of Scotland	25,000
Council Members		
Professor John Sizer, CBE (Chief Executive)		[1]65,000
Professor Michael Bond	Vice Principal, University of Glasgow	4,000
Dr. Chris Carter	Vice Principal, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	4,000
Professor John Darby	Assistant Principal, Napier University	4,000
Mrs. Eilleen Dunning, OBE	Former Headteacher, St. Augustine's School	4,000
Professor Robert Jack, CBE	Retired Senior Partner, McGrigor Donald Solicitors	4,000
Mr. John McClelland	UK Director of Manufacturing and Hardware, IBM	4,000
Mr. Ronald Miller, CBE	Executive Chairman, Dawson International	4,000
Professor Janet Sprent	Professor of Plant Biology, Dundee University	4,000
Professor David Wallace	Professor of Mathematical Physics, University of Edinburgh	4,000
Mr. Ian Wood, CBE	Chairman and Management Director, John Wood Group	4,000
Mr. James Wright	Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	4,000

In addition, Council members are reimbursed expenses arising from attendance at meetings of the council and council subcommittees.
[1] The chief executive is eligible to receive additional performance-related payments of up to 10 per cent. of his gross salary.

Scottish Sports Council

Name	Occupation	Annual Remuneration £
Chairman		
Mr. Graeme M. Simmers, OBE	Businessman	12,468
Council Members		
Mr. G. Malcolm Murrary (Vice Chairman)	Chief Executive (Insurance Company)	4,465
Mr. Michael Barron	Chief Executive (Local Government)	Nil
Mr. Alan Blackshaw	Business Consultant	Nil
Mr. Peter Jim Fairlie	Company Director	Nil
Miss Lesley Grant	Retired Headteacher	Nil
Mr. Alan Grosset	Solicitor	Nil
Mr. John Loughray	Director and Consultant	Nil
Mr. Fred Nelson	Engineer	Nil
Dr. Myra Nimmo	Senior Academic Faculty of Education Strathclyde University	Nil
Mr. John N. M. Frame	Stockbroker	Nil
Mrs. Alison Ramsay	Solicitor	Nil

All council members are entitled to claim expenses incurred as a result of their attendance at council meetings or SSC sponsored.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each of the newly incorporated further education colleges the names of the chairman and board members, their occupations or professions and the level of allowances or remuneration payable.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* I shall arrange for the information held centrally on members and chairmen of boards of management to be sent to the hon. Member. A copy will also be placed in the Library of the House.

Membership of a board of management does not attract remuneration. Boards of management may pay allowances and expenses to members within such criteria as the Secretary of State may determine. The criteria which have been set are the same as those applicable to members of local authorities.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for Scottish Homes and for each of the new town development corporations the name of the chairman and board members, their occupations or professions and the salaries, allowances or other type of remuneration payable.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Name	*Occupation*	*Salary (£)*
Scottish Homes		
Sir James Mellon, KCMG, (Chairman)	Former Diplomat	36,350
John Richards, CBE, PPRIAS, (Deputy Chairman)	Architect, John Richards Associates	16,515
Mrs. Frances McCall, MBE	Member, Management Committee, Calvay Co-op	6,310
Professor Duncan Maclennan, MA, MPhil, FRSA	Professor of Economics and Director, Centre for Housing Research, Glasgow University	6,310
Dr. Tom N. A. Begg, OBE, JP, BA, PhD	Lecturer in Economics, Queen Margaret College Edinburgh	6,310
Mrs. Heather Sheerin, OBE	Co-Director, family owned retail carpet business	6,310
Mrs. Daphne M. W. Sleigh	Freelance Market Researcher	6,310
Cameron H. Parker	Non-executive Vice-Chairman, Lithgows Ltd.	6,310
Professor John R: Small	Deputy Principal Heriot Watt University and Professor of Accountancy and Finance	6,310
Peter McKinlay (ex-officio member)	Chief Executive Scottish Homes	70,527
Glenrothes Development Corporation		
Professor C. Blake, CBE (Chairman)	Former Chairman of William Low & Co. plc	21,540
David B. B. Smith (Deputy Chairman)	Director and Chief Executive of Dunfermline Building Society	9,790
Mrs. Frances Havenga	Exports Director	4,420
John MacDonald, JP	Leader of Fife Regional Council	4,420
Douglas C. Mason	Freelance Journalist	4,420
Iain A. McCrone, CBE	Chairman and Managing Director of McCrone Farmers	4,420
James A. G. Fiddes	Senior Partner, Ryden Property Consultants and Chartered Surveyors	4,420
Mrs. Jane Buchanan, JP	Travel Agent	4,420
Robert J. Taylor	Lecturer in Industrial Studies	4,420
East Kilbride Development Corporation		
J. Allan Denholm, CBE (Chairman)	Company Director	21,540
Harley Marshall, JP (Deputy Chairman)	Company Managing Director	9,790
Mrs. Elaine McDonald	Chartered Accountant	4,420
James R. Mowat	Engineer	4,420
Iain J. A. Dyer	Lecturer, Glasgow University	4,420
John A. A. Spiers	Chartered Accountant and Chartered Surveyor	4,420
Stewart Crawford	East Kilbride District Councillor: Provost	4,420
Colin Robb	Leader of East Kilbride District Council	4,420
Dr. David M. Sanderson	Convener of Strathclyde Regional Council	4,420
Cumbernauld Development Corporation		
David Mitchell, CBE (Chairman)	Joint Managing Director M & N Norman Timber Ltd.	21,540
Tom M. Barrie, JP (Deputy Chairman)	Member, Strathclyde Regional Council	9,790
John A. Dawson	Professor of Marketing, Edinburgh University	4,420
Mrs. Rose Mary McKenna, JP	District Councillor	4,420
James M. Burnett	Chartered Surveyor	4,420
John S. Moreland, OBE	Director, Scottish Nuclear	4,420
P. G. Lockett	Chartered Accountant	4,420
Robert R. C. Taylor	Chairman and Managing Director Robert Taylor Holdings Ltd.	4,420
Ian R. Young	Managing Director, Archibald Young (Brass Founders) Ltd.	4,420
Livingston Development Corporation		
R. S. Watt, CBE (Chairman)	Computer Systems Consultant	21,540
Brian A. Meek, OBE, JP (Deputy Chairman)	Vice President, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association	9,790
Mrs. Isobel Brydie, JP	Member, West Lothian District Council	4,420
William R. V. Percy	Member, Lothian Regional Council	4,420
John S. Young	Former Chairman of Berkley Computer Systems	4,420
Ian Ivory	Investment Manager	4,420
Keith Geddes	Lothian Regional Councillor	4,420

Name	Occupation	Salary (£)
Gordon S. Milne	Retired Managing Director of Scottish Metropolitan	4,420
Charles A. Boyle	Former Director of Manchester Ship Canal Co.	4,420
Irvine Development Corporation		
Maurice Crichton (Chairman)	Retired Chartered Accountant	21,540
Mrs Jeannette M. Mason	Former member of Strathclyde Regional Council	9,790
Jack Carson, JP	Convener of Cunninghame District Council	4,420
David Jerdan	Chartered Surveyor	4,420
Alan Jones	Vice President and Area Manager, Beechams	4,420
Archibald G. O. Walker	Chartered Accountant	4,420
William B. Miller, OBE	Chairman, Prestwick Holdings plc	4,420
Thomas H. Colyer	Member of Strathclyde Regional Council	4,420
Charles Maclean	Company Director	4,420

All the above appointments, except the chief executive, Scottish Homes, are held on a part-time basis. For Scottish Homes, the estimated time commitment is half a day per week for members, one and a half days per week for the deputy chairman and three days per week for the chairman. For the new town development corporations, the expected time commitment is half a day per week for members, one day per week for the deputy chairman and two days per week for the chairman.

Fords

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many fords there are in Scotland where public roads cross watercourses; how many fatal or serious accidents have occurred in each of the last 10 years as a result of vehicles failing to negotiate water on fords on public roads; if he will list fords which have been closed to traffic following such accidents; and what is his Department's policy towards fords and the provision of warning to motorists when water conditions may be dangerous.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* Information is not held centrally as to the number of fords in Scotland on public roads, the number of fatal or serious accidents at fords, nor the number of fords closed to traffic following such accidents.

Roads authorities have a duty to manage and maintain the roads for which they are responsible, including any fords on these roads, to allow for the safe and convenient movement of traffic.

There are prescribed signs to warn of the existence of a ford and of the depth of water. Roads authorities are at liberty to instal such signs without seeking the Secretary of State's consent. Where it is felt that particular circumstances require further warning signs to be erected, roads authorities may seek the Secretary of State's authorisation for non-standard signs.

Examinations

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to introduce a more comprehensive system of moderation of the internal elements of examination under the auspices of the Scottish Vocational Education Council and the Scottish Examination Board; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 May 1993]:* The Scottish Vocational Education Council and the Scottish Examination Board both give a high priority to the quality of external and internal assessment, and to moderation of their awards. They have in place quality assurance and review procedures to ensure that acceptable standards are maintained.

The Howie committee included in its report proposals for a quality assurance system to underpin the validity of the new Scottish upper secondary awards which it has recommended. The proposals contained in the Howie committee's report and all the comments received upon these propopals are under consideration.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to alter the continual assessment element of ScotVec qualifications; what representations he has had regarding the quality and acceptability of ScotVec modules; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 May 1993]:* ScotVec qualifications are evolved in consultation with all interested parties and an independent review conducted by the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1991 reported that employers favoured the assessment techniques used in ScotVec national certificate modules.

The success of the Scottish wider access programme in enabling students to enter higher education is evidence of acceptance of ScotVec's assessment methods and quality assurance. The Scottish Universities Council on Entrance, along with other national bodies, has also recently recognised groupings of ScotVec modules for entrance to higher education.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 April, *Official Report*, column *587*, what plans he has to improve the structures and systems of accountability to elected local authorities by non-elected agencies and non-governmental organisations following his proposed reforms of the local government system in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* There are no plans to amend the present arrangements for ensuring the accountability of non-departmental public bodies in the context of the Government's proposals for local government reform in Scotland.

EDUCATION

Testing

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total cost, at the latest date for which figures are available, of *(a)* materials used or to be used in the scheduled standard assessment tasks for 1993 and *(b)* advertisements relating to testing and commending these tests to parents.

Mr. Forth: The total cost of producing and distributing all the materials for this year's tests of seven and 14-year-olds is estimated at £6·5 million. This is borne entirely by the School Examinations and Assessment Council. There is no direct cost to schools.

It is estimated that the cost of advertising the leaflet "How is Your Child Doing at School?" which provides information to parents about this summer's tests is £415,000.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education by what date he expects his policy in regard to standard assessment tasks to be fully operational.

Mr. Forth: I refer the right hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend made to the House on 11 May, *Official Report*, columns *651-60*.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received from secondary schools in Abingdon concerning the operation of his system of national testing of school pupils.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received various oral and written comments from secondary schools in Abingdon. These have concerned various aspects of the tests for 14-year-olds. The review being conducted by Sir Ron Dearing will consider such comments about the tests, with the aim of improving the assessment and testing arrangements in the future.

Teachers' Dispute, Wandsworth

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was his response to the letter of 23 April from the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers requesting a meeting to discuss the dispute between the union and the London borough of Wandsworth.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend's private secretary replied on his behalf on 30 April. She advised the NASUWT that it should make its concerns and views known to Sir Ron Dearing who is conducting a review of the national curriculum and assessment arrangements. She said that meanwhile there was no justification for abandoning this summer's tests or for a boycott of the tests, which would damage pupils' education and hamper the achievement of a more streamlined curriculum and assessment framework.

Higher Education

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of students entering higher education for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The table gives the number of first-year students on higher education courses at publicly funded higher education institutions in Great Britain from 1979 onwards. It includes both UK and overseas domiciled students.

Academic Year	*Student numbers (000s)*
1979	327·4
1980	340·4
1981	355·4
1982	356·9
1983	365·4
1984	370·3
1985	391·2
1986	410·3
1987	415·4
1988	438·3
1989	473·2
1990	511·5
1991	587·3

The number of students in higher education has expanded even faster than the rate of growth envisaged in the 1991 higher education White Paper. Over one in four young people were entering higher education in 1992. Government spending plans provide for an increase of 104,000 or 13 per cent. in higher education student numbers during the next three years. This will allow the current record levels of participation to be maintained and give institutions a period during which to consolidate their recent achievements.

Special Schools

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many pupils in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local education authority are educated in (i) local authority-maintained special schools, (ii) non-maintained special schools and (iii) independent special schools;

(2) how many pupils in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local education authority have boarding places in (i) local authority-maintained special schools, (ii) non-maintained special schools and (iii) independent special schools.

Mr. Forth: The information requested for maintained and non-maintained special schools is shown in the table.

Information on independent special schools can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Number of pupils and boarding pupils in maintained and non-maintained special schools for each LEA in England (including hospital special and general hospital schools).

January 1992

	Maintained		*Non-maintained*	
	All pupils	*Boarders(1)*	*All pupils*	*Boarders(1)*
Corporation of London	0	0	0	0
Camden	372	62	0	0
Greenwich	742	56	0	0

	Maintained		Non-maintained	
	All pupils	Boarders(1)	All pupils	Boarders(1)
Hackney	651	150	0	0
Hammersmith	436	55	0	0
Islington	335	26	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	87	86	0	0
Lambeth	843	98	0	0
Lewisham	466	59	0	0
Southwark	491	61	0	0
Tower Hamlets	511	41	0	0
Wandsworth	715	195	0	0
Westminster	168	29	0	0
Barking	161	0	0	0
Barnet	365	50	0	0
Bexley	272	0	0	0
Brent	353	0	0	0
Bromley	358	0	44	41
Croydon	515	14	0	0
Ealing	459	0	0	0
Enfield	429	0	0	0
Haringey	342	0	0	0
Harrow	220	0	0	0
Havering	225	0	0	0
Hillingdon	402	0	89	34
Hounslow	391	0	0	0
Kingston upon Thames	231	0	0	0
Merton	249	0	0	0
Newham	342	0	0	0
Redbridge	382	0	9	0
Richmond upon Thames	149	0	0	0
Sutton	311	0	0	0
Waltham Forest	777	20	0	0
Birmingham	3,015	222	0	0
Coventry	820	65	0	0
Dudley	571	0	0	0
Sandwell	819	43	0	0
Solihull	277	0	0	0
Walsall	575	25	0	0
Wolverhampton	501	8	0	0
Knowsley	625	53	0	0
Liverpool	1,585	94	147	80
St. Helens	470	0	0	0
Sefton	428	0	165	97
Wirral	772	0	69	32
Bolton	483	9	37	12
Bury	298	23	0	0
Manchester	1,849	106	0	0
Oldham	593	0	0	0
Rochdale	503	28	0	0
Salford	451	0	0	0
Stockport	448	37	323	102
Tameside	422	0	0	0
Trafford	398	0	0	0
Wigan	868	66	0	0
Barnsley	158	0	0	0
Doncaster	710	36	308	244
Rotherham	628	0	0	0
Sheffield	878	133	0	0
Bradford	962	7	0	0
Calderdale	199	0	54	54
Kirklees	645	74	30	22
Leeds	1,019	16	113	81
Wakefield	635	16	0	0
Gateshead	364	24	0	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	792	69	156	96
North Tyneside	439	0	121	20
South Tyneside	346	0	0	0
Sunderland	695	0	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Avon	2,065	228	0	0
Bedfordshire	1,143	81	0	0
Berkshire	1,649	79	239	234
Buckinghamshire	1,582	275	0	0
Cambridgeshire	984	77	0	0
Cheshire	1,505	333	171	163
Cleveland	1,415	58	0	0
Cornwall	298	57	0	0
Cumbria	306	0	0	0
Derbyshire	1,356	97	98	48

	Maintained		Non-maintained	
	All pupils	Boarders(1)	All pupils	Boarders(1)
Devon	1,787	185	344	250
Dorset	1,104	57	76	35
Durham	1,068	127	0	0
East Sussex	1,366	65	438	324
Essex	2,609	147	160	73
Gloucestershire	1,320	108	65	33
Hampshire	3,688	178	279	279
Hereford and Worcester	1,260	38	172	172
Hertfordshire	1,911	275	63	63
Humberside	1,240	121	0	0
Isle of Wight	252	0	44	42
Kent	3,346	559	514	418
Lancashire	3,258	218	159	112
Leicestershire	1,104	165	0	0
Lincolnshire	1,145	159	0	0
Norfolk	896	83	0	0
North Yorkshire	1,007	197	202	170
Northamptonshire	1,158	17	28	26
Northumberland	488	62	0	0
Nottinghamshire	1,718	80	93	65
Oxfordshire	839	48	130	127
Shropshire	550	14	77	77
Somerset	609	23	61	43
Staffordshire	2,222	181	0	0
Suffolk	792	123	0	0
Surrey	1,783	325	636	578
Warwickshire	1,301	148	0	0
West Sussex	1,233	123	90	58
Wiltshire	753	175	22	15
England	92,101	7,442	5,826	4,320

(1) Boarders are included in total pupils figures.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average annual cost of *(a)* boarding and *(b)* day places in (i) local authority-maintained special schools, (ii) non-maintained special schools and (iii) independent special schools.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many applications for grant-maintained status have been approved since 1 December 1992 *(a)* without modification and *(b)* with modification in respect of (i) admission numbers, (ii) admission policy and (iii) incorporation date.

Mr. Forth: Since 1 December 1992, 70 applications for grant-maintained status have been approved without modification, and 118 with modification. Of this latter group, 26 applications were approved with modification in respect of admission numbers, 95 in respect of admission policy, and 10 in respect of incorporation date. Some applications were approved with more than one modification.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list by local education authority the number of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* nursery nurses and *(c)* teachers' aides employed who are disabled.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not centrally recorded.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mongolia

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve relations with Mongolia.

Mr. Goodlad: Relations with Mongolia are very good. January marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic relations. This year has seen the introduction of a bilateral aid programme for Mongolia of £2·7 million over the next three years. This is aimed at helping the Mongolians with their economic reform programme, being carried out in the face of considerable hardship. A bilateral round table meeting is scheduled for this October in London.

Somalia

16. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for Somalia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The deployment of foreign troops has radically improved the relief situation, although security remains a major problem. Somali military factions have agreed to a ceasefire, disarmament and the formation of a transitional government.

Yugoslavia

17. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about developments in Bosnia and the Balkans.

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in former Yugoslavia.

28. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Bosnia.

34. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European Community counterparts on the conflict in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement.

36. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Government policy on Bosnia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The rejection of the Vance-Owen peace plan by the Bosnian Serb Assembly is a serious set-back but should not be seen as the last word on the agreement. We are pursuing a twin-track policy: to continue planning for implementation of the plan, while at the same time increasing pressure on the Serbs to accept and implement the peace plan and to desist from further attacks. We are already intensifying sanctions, and are consulting closely with our partners and allies on the possibility of stronger measures if the Serbs do not comply.

A political settlement in Bosnia would ease tensions in the region and reduce the risk of possible spillover into other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

20. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of sanctions against Serbia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sanctions are having an increasingly harsh effect on the Serbian economy. Inflation is running at over 225 per cent per month. Over 70 per cent of the work force are unemployed or idle. *Per capita* gross domestic product has fallen to the 1969 level and severe shortages are apparent in all sectors of the economy. The provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 820 and the tighter enforcement measures being taken will have a major impact on the effectiveness of the sanctions regime.

37. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government have taken to ensure the release of the women held in Bosnian rape camps; if he will initiate steps to have rape classified as a war crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 27 April *Official Report*, column *372*. Rape is already a war crime since it is specifically prohibited by article 27 of the fourth Geneva convention.

Middle East

18. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the middle east peace negotiations.

21. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the middle east peace process.

35. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards a peace settlement between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Arab parties resumed in Washington on 27 April. We welcome the resumption. We continue to urge the parties to negotiate seriously to produce early visible progress towards lasting settlement on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

Denmark (Referendum)

22. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for avoiding the isolation of Denmark in the event of a second no vote in its referendum.

Mr. Hurd: We do not expect the Danes to vote no.

Japan

23. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom/Japanese relations.

Mr. Goodlad: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs confirmed during his visit to Japan on 6 to 7 April, relations between the United Kingdom and Japan are excellent. We are maintaining a high level of ministerial contact so as to develop our co-operation in all fields including political dialogue, trade, investment, science and technology and broader cultural and educational exchanges.

30. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Japanese Foreign Minister to discuss bilateral relations.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the new Japanese Foreign Minister, Mr. Kabun Muto, on 7 April during his visit to Tokyo. He had also met on 6 April the acting Foreign Minister, Mr. Yohei Kono, and had with him a fruitful discussion on how to develop further the excellent bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Japan.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the Cyprus issue with the Turkish Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Mr. Cetin in London on 23 November, he made clear our expectation that Turkey would use her significant influence to encourage the Turkish Cypriot community to work actively towards a settlement to the dispute. We use every opportunity to reiterate to the Turks our desire for a solution to the Cyprus problem and will do so again in the run-up to the resumed intercommunal talks in New York on 24 May.

Iran

24. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with members of the Government of Iran concerning hostages and detained persons in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met the Iranian Foreign Minister, Dr. Velayati, in New York on 25 September 1992. He met the Iranian chargé d'affaires in London on 26 January 1993 and I met him on 5 May 1993. The Iranian Government are well aware of our views on hostages.

Open Government

25. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution he expects to make to the open government initiative.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told the House on 12 March, we will be publishing a White Paper on openness during the present Session. I have no wish to anticipate its recommendations.

Sudan

26. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy on the current troubles in Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A root cause of the misery in Sudan is the civil war. We welcome the reconvening of peace talks under the auspices of the Nigerian Government and are discussing with our EC partners, the US and others what further the international community can do to alleviate the suffering.

We shall maintain strong pressure on the Government of Sudan to improve their performance in areas of concern to us, especially human rights and the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis. We were one of the first to respond at the outset of the present crisis in November 1990, and have since then committed over £63 million in humanitarian aid. This makes us one of the leading donors to Sudan.

Eritrea

29. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards Eritrea following its referendum.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We warmly welcome the outcome of the referendum on Eritrea's status. United Nations observers have confirmed their satisfaction with the process. This opens the way for recognition of Eritrea. The Eritreans have announced that their independence will be formally declared on 24 May. Accordingly, we plan to announce our decision on recognition by that date.

Cyprus

31. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to encourage an amicable resolution on the island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present situation in Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Nations Secretary-General held a formal meeting with the leaders of the two Cypriot communities in New York on 30 March. The two leaders expressed their willingness to resume talks in New York on 24 May and to use the "Set of Ideas" for the purpose of reaching a mutually acceptable overall framework agreement. We continue to give vigorous support to the United Nations initiative.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Turkish Government, and when this was last done, regarding the number of settlers from mainland Turkey now moving to northern Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The questions of settlement and property rights in Cyprus are intrinsic to the UN "Set of Ideas", endorsed by the Security Council as the basis of a settlement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last urged Turkey at the highest level to support the "Set of Ideas" when he met Mr. Demirel and Mr. Cetin on 23 November. We keep in close touch with the Turkish Government, and make our views clear, through Her Majesty's ambassadors in Ankara and elsewhere.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when ministers or officials of his Department last met opposition leaders of political parties operating in northern Cyprus; when such meetings took place; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Goodlad: There have been 13 meetings between officials and Turkish Cypriot "opposition" leaders in the last three months, including a guest of Government visit by Mustafa Akinci in London on 24 March. Discussions included the negotiations towards a settlement of the Cyprus problem and the situation in north Cyprus.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's estimate of the number of people who have migrated from Turkey to northern Cyprus in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Goodlad: We do not compile such statistics.

Russia

33. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation to discuss the current political situation in Europe.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed European political issues with Mr. Kozyrev when he met him in Moscow in April. They have since discussed these issues by telephone.

UN Peace Operations

38. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many countries, and in which, there are currently United Nations peacekeeping or peace monitoring operations.

39. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many countries United Nations peacekeeping or peace monitoring units are operating.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are 12 current United Nations peacekeeping or monitoring missions:
UNTSO—The UN Truce Supervision Organisation
UNDOF—The UN Disengagement Observer Force
UNIFIL—The UN Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMOGIP—The UN Monitoring Organisation India/Pakistan
UNFICYP—The UN Force in Cyprus
ONUSAL—The UN Missions in El Salvador
UNAVEM—The UN Angola Verification Mission
MINURSO—The UN Referendum Monitory Mission in Western Sahara
UNIKOM—The UN Iraq/Kuwait Observer Mission
UNTAC—The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNPROFOR—The UN Protection Force (Former Yugoslavia)
ONUMOZ—The UN Operation in Mozambique
A deployment is also underway to UNOSOM II which will take over from UNITAF—the Unified Task Force—in Somalia.

Angola

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present situation in Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Talks between the Government of Angola and UNITA continue under United Nations auspices in Abidjan. We continue to support the UN in its efforts to bring the two parties to agreement on a ceasefire, full implementation of the Bicesse peace accords, and free access throughout the country for much-needed humanitarian aid.

Brazil

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Brazilian Government about their 1988 constitutional commitment to demarcate lands for their Indian population within a five-year period.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in regular touch with the Brazilian authorities about the rights of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. They are fully aware of our concern. In February this year, the Brazilian Minister of Justice publicly reconfirmed his intention to complete the demarcation of the lands of Brazil's indigenous peoples by October 1993 in compliance with Brazil's 1988 constitution.

Human Rights

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to raise the rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil at the United Nations conference on human rights in Vienna.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The aims of the United Kingdom delegation at the United Nations conference on human rights in Vienna will be to promote universal adherence to existing standards, to explore ways to improve their implementation and to examine the relationship between human rights, democracy and development. The rights of the indigenous peoples in Brazil will be for consideration under item 11 of the agenda: "Consideration of contemporary trends in and new challenges to the full realisation of all human rights of women and men, including those of persons belonging to vulnerable groups".

European Treaties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the proposed names for the treaties comprising *(a)* the current treaty of Rome, as amended, with the contents of titles II, III and IV of the treaty on European union signed at Maastricht and *(b)* titles I, V, VI and VII of the treaty on European union signed at Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Following the entry into force of the treaty on European union, four treaties will be in force:
(a) the treaty establishing the European Community ("The EC Treaty") i.e., the present treaty of Rome as amended by title II of the treaty on European union;
(b) the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community ("The ECSC Treaty") as amended by title III of the treaty on European union;
(c) the treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community ("The EURATOM treaty") as amended by title IV of the treaty on European union;
(d) the treaty on European union itself, in its entirety.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what liaison has taken place between the Benefits Agency and organisations representing the disabled in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England.

Mr. Scott: The operation of the Benefits Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Michael Bichard. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 11 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what liaison has taken place between the Benefits Agency and organisations representing the disabled in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England.

The Agency is committed to an equal opportunities policy. For our customers with disabilities, this means that wherever possible we will ensure that their dealings with us should not be limited by reason of their disabilities.

In Wales, our staff have had a good deal of contact with organisations representing people with disabilities, much of it at local level. A review of our customer service across Wales was held in October 1992, attended by many organisations (including several representing the needs of people with disabilities in Wales). We have also run a one day seminar jointly with the Wales Council for the Blind, aimed at carers and people with disabilities. With the introduction of the new disability benefits last year, a bilingual English/Welsh cassette was produced for blind customers, and was distributed through talking newspapers and to all Social Service Departments in Wales.

A series of "roadshows" using our own Benefit Bus and the Wales Council for the Disabled WCD advice and information bus took place during February of this year, at 10 locations throughout Wales. Following this, a series of one day seminars, organised jointly by the Agency and by the council,

have been held. They were attended by our own customer service staff in Wales, and by representatives from relevant organisations. A member of our staff was seconded to the council last year for 10 months.

Nationally, we liaise and meet regularly with a number of organisations representing the needs of people with disabilities. These include the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, People First, and the National Schizophrenia Society. We are looking at a number of their services with a view to publicising them through our network of District Information Officers and Customer Service Managers in local benefit offices. We also liaise regularly with a number of other customer organisations, including the National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureau (NACAB).

I meet senior staff from NACAB six monthly.

As the Agency's customer charter makes clear, we are committed to providing a service which is accessible for all our customers. We recognise that disabled people may have particular needs and we will continue to look for ways to make our services easier to use. One way in which we intend to meet this commitment is through a national forum to enable organisations representing or comprising people with disabilities to contribute to the Agency's ongoing work to improve services for disabled customers. The first meeting took place last September. That first, very informal meeting, was mainly, but not exclusively, about the disability benefits. A second meeting took place on 5 May this year. The forum will continue twice yearly whilst there is the demand.

A small group of organisations have also met with the Agency to discuss how to improve access to our public areas. The outcome is that we are redrafting and improving accommodation guidance for District and Unit Managers.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Young People, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds living in the Durham area are not in full-time education and are not entitled to benefit.

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 11 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17 year olds living in the Durham area are not in full-time education and are not entitled to benefit.

This information is not available in the format requested except at a disproportionate cost. This is because the Benefits Agency does not keep statistics relating to disallowed claims by age of applicant. However, I have appended information relating to the number of successful applications for Severe Hardship payments made in the Benefits Agency's North Durham and South Durham Districts during February and March 1993. This information does not equate exactly to the number of individuals in receipt of a Severe Hardship payment, since an individual may have made more than one application during the period. Additionally, directions to make Severe Hardship payments normally last eight weeks, so some of these directions may not now be current.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Successful Severe Hardship claims in the Benefits Agency's North and South Durham districts; February and March 1993

	February 1993	*March 1993*
North Durham	32	43
South Durham	34	32

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances compensation is payable in respect of delays in handling claims for mobility allowance; and how many times these have arisen between 31 October 1992 and 31 March 1993.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on Tuesday 4 May, at column *10*.

Between 31 October 1992 and 31 March 1993, around 50 cases have been dealt with as a result of the delays in handling mobility allowance claims.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Maternity Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the hospitals in Northern Ireland which had consultant obstetric and/or general practitioner maternity beds in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with the numbers of beds of each type in each hospital in each year.

Mr. Hanley: The average numbers of available beds in the obstetrics and general practitioner maternity specialities in Northern Ireland in 1991-92 and the period from 1 April 1992 to 31 December 1992 are as follows:

Hospital	*1991-92*		*April 1992 to 31 December 1992*	
	OBS	*GP Maternity*	*OBS*	*GB Maternity*
Ards	25	—	20	—
Belfast City	64	—	64	—
Downe	20	—	20	—
Lagan Valley	33	—	27	—
Mater	24	—	23	—
Royal Maternity	74	—	72	—
Ulster	44	—	43	—
Ballymena Cottage	20	16	10	16
Robinson Memorial	—	14	—	14
Mid Ulster	26	—	26	—
Moyle	19	—	19	—
Route	19	—	18	—
Waveney	25	—	25	—
Craigavon Area	61	—	61	—
Daisy Hill	52	—	52	—
South Tyrone	31	—	29	—

Hospital	1991-92 OBS	1991-92 GP Maternity	April 1992 to 31 December 1992 OBS	April 1992 to 31 December 1992 GB Maternity
Altnagelvin	68	—	61	—
Erne	30	—	25	—
Tyrone Co.	31	—	31	—
Total	666	30	626	30

Housing Construction, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when planning application No. X/92/0120 by Braemar Construction for seven dwellings at the rear of Beverley Court, Newtownards was received; when neighbour notification notices were issued; why no neighbour notification notice was issued to the occupier of 3 Beverley Court; what opinion Ards borough council expressed; when planning approval was issued; when work commenced on site; when the planning officer received a letter of 24 February from Mr. Robert Groves of 3 Beverley Court about this; and when a full reply to the letter will be issued.

Mr. Atkins: The application was received on 13 February 1992. Neighbour notification notices were issued on 18 February 1992 and the Department's records show that a notice was sent to "The Occupier of No. 3 Beverley Court". The application was presented to Ards borough council at its meeting of 22 June 1992 with an opinion to approve. The council agreed with this opinion and approval issued on 19 July 1992; the divisional planning office has no record of when work started. Mr. Groves' letter of 24 February 1993 was received by the divisional planning office on 26 February 1993. The matters raised required a site survey and a reply was issued on 6 May 1993.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the actions under *(a)* fair employment legislation and *(b)* equal opportunities legislation, which have been successfully defended by (i) Government Departments, (ii) education boards, (iii) health boards, (iv) local authorities and (v) other public bodies, indicating in each case whether the unsuccessful applicant was supported by the Fair Employment Agency or Fair Employment Commission or Equal Opportunities Commission and the costs incurred by the successful respondent in cases where there was such support.

Mr. Atkins: Information on actions under sex discrimination legislation prior to 1 January 1990 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Individual complaints of religious discrimination before 1 January 1990 were brought under the procedure in the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976 and were not defended as such or prosecuted by either party; instead the Fair Employment Agency acted as an impartial investigator. Under the 1976 Act a total of 593 findings were made on foot of individual complaints, of which 496 were findings of no unlawful discrimination. Details as to the respondent in these cases could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information relating to actions brought since 1 January 1990 under the Fair Employment (NI) Act and the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 is as follows:

Actions successfully defended under Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989

Applicant	Respondent	FEC supported
(i) *Government Departments*		
Maguire	Northern Ireland Civil Service Commission	No
(ii) *Education and library boards*		
Black	Belfast education and library board	No
(iii) *Health and social services boards*		
No cases		
(iv) *Local authorities*		
Little	Fermanagh district council	No
McCausland	Dungannon district council	Yes
Robinson	Belfast city council	No
(v) *Other public bodies*		
Meek	Fire Authority for Northern Ireland	No
Tierney	Fire Authority for Northern Ireland	Yes
Park	Post Office	No
Gilbride	Post Office	No
McKeown	Local Enterprise Development Unit	No

Actions successfully defended under Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Act 1976

Applicant	*Respondent*	*EOC supported*
(i) *Government Departments*		
Burnim	Northern Ireland Civil Service	No
Cowley	Inland Revenue	No
(ii) *Education and library boards*		
Fenton	Belfast education and library board	Yes
Beattie	Belfast education and library board	Yes
Lisk	North Eastern education and library board	Yes
Hood	South Eastern education and library board	No
(iii) *Health and social services boards*		
McNearney	Eastern health and social services board	No
Young	Eastern health and social services board	No
Jess	Eastern health and social services board	Yes
(iv) *Local authorities*		
McKinney	Belfast city council	Yes
McDonald	Newtownabbey borough council	Yes
Moore	Lisburn borough council	No
Kemp	Belfast county council	No
(v) *Other public bodies*		
Devlin	Northern Ireland Electricity	No

No information is available about the costs incurred by respondents in successfully defending cases.

Civil Servants

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants currently in the Northern Ireland Office have been seconded or transferred from *(a)* the Foreign Office, *(b)* the Home Office and *(c)* the Ministry of Defence; and what their rank was before such move and their current rank.

Mr. Mates: Four have been seconded on loan or transferred from the Foreign Office, 18 from the Home Office and 10 from the Ministry of Defence.

Their grades are as follows:

Current Grade	Grade before joining Northern Ireland Office
1 Grade 1	1 Grade 2
2 Grade 2	2 Grade 3
2 Grade 3	1 Grade 3, 1 Grade 5
1 Grade 4	1 Chief Information Officer
4 Grade 5	3 Grade 5, 1 Administration Trainee
1 Grade 6	1 Grade 6
9 Grade 7	6 Grade 7, 1 Senior Executive Officer
	1 Higher Executive Officer,
	1 Executive Officer
5 Higher Executive Officer	3 Higher Executive Officer,
	1 Executive Officer,
	1 Administration Officer
1 Information Officer	1 Information Officer
1 Administrative Officer	1 Photo-printer
1 Senior Personal Secretary	1 Personal Secretary
3 Personal Secretary	3 Personal Secretary
1 Typist	1 Typist

Transport Holding Company

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to privatise the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company; what estimate of asset proceeds he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: There are no plans to privatise the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company.

School Pupils

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the number of pupils at each of *(a)* maintained primary schools, *(b)* maintained secondary schools, *(c)* maintained grammar schools, *(d)* controlled primary schools, *(e)* controlled secondary schools and *(f)* controlled grammar schools, in each of the education and library board areas in Northern Ireland for the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Area board	*1988*		
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Grammar*
Belfast			
Controlled	13,168	6,535	1,747
Maintained	16,707	9,335	—
Voluntary	206	—	13,307
Western			
Controlled	10,445	5,267	2,178
Maintained	25,322	12,087	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,310
North-eastern			
Controlled	26,397	13,931	3,968
Maintained	13,345	7,430	—
Voluntary	5	—	8,696
South-eastern			
Controlled	23,398	11,444	3,110
Maintained	11,514	4,957	—
Voluntary	160	—	6,789
Southern			
Controlled	15,766	9,058	1,929
Maintained	26,066	12,490	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,247

Area board	Primary	1989 Secondary	Grammar
Belfast			
Controlled	13,295	6,032	1,750
Maintained	17,063	9,455	—
Voluntary	—	—	13,475
Western			
Controlled	10,571	5,140	2,208
Maintained	25,634	12,076	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,476
North-eastern			
Controlled	26,418	13,178	4,054
Maintained	13,428	7,237	—
Voluntary	4	—	8,668
South-eastern			
Controlled	23,536	10,928	3,150
Maintained	11,817	4,829	—
Voluntary	158	—	6,820
Southern			
Controlled	15,890	8,738	1,998
Maintained	26,427	12,355	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,282

Area board	Primary	1990 Secondary	Grammar
Belfast			
Controlled	13,472	5,659	1,723
Maintained	17,431	9,420	—
Voluntary	—	—	13,459
Western			
Controlled	10,615	4,981	2,229
Maintained	25,860	11,906	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,458
North-eastern			
Controlled	26,445	12,619	4,091
Maintained	13,592	7,047	—
Voluntary	—	—	8,583
South-eastern			
Controlled	23,639	10,547	3,142
Maintained	11,944	4,827	—
Voluntary	166	—	6,919
Southern			
Controlled	15,994	8,535	1,985
Maintained	26,609	12,273	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,289

Area board	Primary	1991 Secondary	Grammar
Belfast			
Controlled	13,769	5,335	1,748
Maintained	17,553	9,431	—
Voluntary	—	—	13,858
Western			
Controlled	10,471	4,763	2,242
Maintained	25,983	11,936	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,636
North-eastern			
Controlled	26,278	12,235	4,149
Maintained	13,529	6,983	—
Voluntary	—	—	8,712
South-eastern			
Controlled	23,697	10,262	3,194
Maintained	12,110	4,984	—
Voluntary	93	—	7,048
Southern			
Controlled	15,966	8,496	2,022
Maintained	26,435	12,242	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,534

Area board	Primary	1992 Secondary	Grammar
Belfast			
Controlled	13,857	5,130	1,736
Maintained	17,818	9,614	—
Voluntary	—	—	14,326
Western			
Controlled	10,435	4,750	2,307
Maintained	26,019	12,257	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,818
North-eastern			
Controlled	26,171	12,137	4,199
Maintained	13,604	7,034	—
Voluntary	—	—	8,866
South-eastern			
Controlled	23,717	10,245	3,214
Maintained	11,899	5,155	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,181
Southern			
Controlled	15,841	8,683	2,012
Maintained	26,447	12,520	—
Voluntary	—	—	7,784

Ulster Young Militants

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will proscribe the Ulster Young Militants; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The question of whether certain organisations should be proscribed is kept under review. The fact that a particular organisation may not be proscribed confers no immunity from prosecution in respect of substantive criminal acts which it or its members may commit.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the truck cargo heavy duty II vehicles used by his Department comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency Safety Series No. 6 Regulations 1985, as amended in 1990.

Mr. Aitken: The International Atomic Energy Agency Safety Series No. 6 Regulations 1985, as amended in 1990, apply primarily to the containers or packaging used for the safe transport of radioactive material. In formulating safety procedures for nuclear warhead transport, full account is taken of national and international civil regulations on transport of radioactive materials, where relevant.

Biological and Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what prior warnings of the hazard and effects of the incapacitating agent BZ were given to service personnel who were tested with this agent by his Department; in which years these tests were carried out; how many service personnel were tested with the agent; and which regiments or branches of the United Kingdom armed services these personnel were from;

(2) on what date information about CR gas was first passed from the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence to the United States Department of Defense; in what form this information was passed; and if this information was passed under the terms of the technical co-operation programme;

(3) on what date the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence received the last quantity of nerve agent VX from the United States Department of Defense; which United States Department of Defense establishment supplied the quantity of nerve gas; what safety precautions were taken during the transfer of the nerve agent; and which United States safety authorities, British safety authorities and British local councils were informed beforehand of the transfer of this nerve agent;

(4) how the workings of the basic standardisation agreement between the British, American and Canadian armies were affected by the British decision to give up offensive work on chemical and biological weapons;

(5) how often the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada have met under the terms of the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence; and what were the dates and locations of each of these meetings;

(6) what tests and studies his Department has carried out using the organism pasteurella tularensis; when and where these experiments took place; and if the results of this scientific activity were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia;

(7) how many scientific papers co-authored by scientists from the chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down and their counterparts in the United States of America military have been published since 1979; what were the dates of these papers; and in which scientific journals they were published;

(8) what experiments his Department has carried out on the chemical agent phencyclidine; when and where the experiments were carried out; and if the results of the experiments were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia;

(9) what stocks of toxins have been transferred from the United States of America Department of Defence to the Ministry of Defence or British scientific research institutions since 1979; from which United States of America Department of Defence establishments these toxins have been transferred; and under which international defence agreements these toxins have been transferred.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what prior warnings of the hazard and effects of the incapacitating agent BZ were given to service personnel who were tested with this agent by his Department; in which years these tests were carried out; how many service personnel were tested with the agent; and which regiments or branches of the United Kingdom armed services these personnel were from (Question 2, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. This work includes the evaluation of the potential hazard of possible agents such as the incapacitating agent BZ.

3. The Service volunteers in the studies involving BZ came from all branches of the Armed Services in response to a request for volunteers to participate in studies at the then Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment. The volunteers were informed that the purpose of the tests was to assess the effects of a potential agent which might affect their behaviour. Volunteers were screened for normality by a resident Army Psychiatrist on arrival at Porton Down and checked again after the study. These studies were carried out in the mid 1960s. It would involve a disproportionate amount of effort to determine which regiments or branches of the Armed Forces these personnel were from.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him on what date information about CR gas was first passed from the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence to the United States Department of Defense; in what form this information was passed; and if this information was passed under the terms of The Technical Co-operation Programme (Question 5, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of that programme evaluation is carried out of chemicals that may be used by an aggressor. Research into CR gas at the then Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down commenced in 1962. The information gained in the research programme during the subsequent years has formed part of the chemical and biological defence programme which has been the subject of information exchange and collaboration with the United States Department of Defense on a continuing basis. This information was exchanged under the aegis of the defence agreements referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP, in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Columns 255-256 which include the Technical Co-operation Programme. A report written in 1962 was provided to the United States Department of Defense under the terms of this Programme. It is not possible to be more precise about the form in which the information was exchanged and when as we do not maintain records in a way that enables us to readily access this information.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993 :

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him on what date the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence received the last quantity of nerve agent VX from the United States Department of Defense, which United States Department of Defense establishment supplied the quantity of nerve gas; what safety precautions were taken during the transfer of the nerve agent: and which United States safety authorities, British safety authorities and British local councils were informed beforehand of the transfer of this

nerve agent (Question 6, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of the materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. The last transfer of VX from the United States of America took place in June 1967 for a collaborative trial at Porton Down on downwind hazard evaluation and the material was provided and shipped by Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. The transfer took place by US military aircraft into Mildenhall, Suffolk. The material was shipped in a sealed container as a Class A poison under the regulations prescribed by the interstate Commerce Commission and the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency. The shipment was escorted by a 3 man escort equipped with protective clothing and detection and decontamination equipment. It was then transferred to the then Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down by road convoy in accordance with the regulations in force at the time in the United Kingdom. These would have included notifying the relevant Police Forces of the operation and the provision of additional escorts, including a police vehicle. Safety precautions were applied to this transfer in accordance with the appropriate standards at that time.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how the workings of the Basic Standardisation Agreement between the British, American and Canadian armies were affected by the British decision to give up offensive work on chemical and biological weapons (Question 8, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Basic Standardisation Agreement between the American, British and Canadian armies promotes co-operation and interoperability through standardisation amongst the armies of the three Nations. As the agreement is a broad one and is not specific to chemical and biological aspects, the effect of the UK decision to give up offensive work on chemical and biological weapons was that such UK information ceased to be produced and could not be exchanged.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how often the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada have met under the terms of the 1980 Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence; and what were the dates and locations of each of these meetings (Question 9, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The aim of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Chemical and Biological Defence is to integrate the programmes of the three countries to the maximum possible extent. The Steering Group under the MOU meets annually whilst the Programme Officers and Requirements Officers meet at six monthly intervals. In addition, experts from the three countries meet under the aegis of the MOU to address specific topics on an as required basis.

3. The Steering Group meets in rotation usually at the headquarters of the respective Departments of Defence. The Group has met twelve times as follows:

Date	*Location*
30 June 1981	United States of America
23 March 1983	United Kingdom
11 April 1984	Canada
24 September 1984	United Kingdom
21 November 1985	United States of America
5 June 1986	Canada
24 September 1987	United Kingdom
18 November 1988	United States of America
6 October 1989	United Kingdom
12 October 1990	Canada
25 October 1991	United States of America
24 November 1992	United Kingdom

4. The Programme Officers and Requirement Officers (PRO/RO) of each of the three countries meet at six monthly intervals in one of the countries in turn. These meetings usually take place at the respective chemical and biological defence establishments ie. the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, the Defence Research Establishment at Suffield, Canada, and the United States Army Chemical and Biological Defense Command at Edgewood, Maryland. The dates of these meetings were as follows:

Date	*Location*
17 December 1980	United Kingdom
21-22 October 1981	United Kingdom
	United States of America
3-8 June 1982	Canada
13-14 October 1982	United Kingdom
21-23 March 1983	United Kingdom
26-27 May 1983	United States of America
9-10 April 1984	Canada
11-12 September 1984	United States of America
11-13 March 1985	United Kingdom
1-3 October 1985	Canada
17-19 March 1986	United States of America
29 September-1 October 1986	United Kingdom
27-29 April 1987	Canada
9-11 September 1987	United States of America
22-24 March 1988	United Kingdom
27-29 September 1988	Canada
3-5 April 1989	United States of America
19-21 September 1989	United Kingdom
30 April-2 May 1990	Canada
18-20 September 1990	United States of America
19-21 March 1991	United Kingdom
10-12 September 1991	Canada
24-26 March 1992	United States of America
15-17 September 1992	United Kingdom
23-25 March 1993	Canada

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what tests and studies his Department has carried out using the organism pasteurella tularensis; when and where these experiments took place; and if the results of this scientific activity were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada and Australia (Question 10, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Tests and studies on the organism Pasteurella tularensis (now known as Francisella tularensis) have been carried out since the early 1950s by the then Microbiological Research Department, subsequently by the Microbiological Research Establishment, Porton Down until its closure in 1979 and since then by the Chemical Defence Establishment, now the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down. Whilst some of the initial work had relevance to the feasibility of a retaliatory biological warfare capability, all

offensive work ceased in the late 1950s and since then work on this organism has been in support of the programme to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat the biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The information gained has been the subject of information exchange and collaboration with the United States of America, Canada and Australia on a continuing basis. This information was exchanged under the aegis of the defence agreements referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, The Right Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP, in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many scientific papers co-authored by scientists from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and their counterparts in the United States of America military have been published since 1979; what were the dates of these papers; and which scientific journals they were published (Question 11, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Our records show that the following scientific papers have been co-authored by scientists from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and our counterparts in the United States of America defense establishments since 1979;

a. Identification of encapsulated and non-encapsulated Yersinia pestis by immunofluorescence tests using polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies.
Epidem Ire nf. *101*, (1988), 59-73

b. An investigation of possible models for the production of progressive pulmonary fibrosis in the rat. The effects of repeated intratracheal instillation of bleomycin.
Toxicology, *51*, (1988), 101-110.

c. A model for carbamate and organophosphate-induced enemiis in humans.
Neuroscience and Biobehavoural Reviews, Vol. *15*, (1991), pp 179-184.

d. Identification of Bacillus anthracis by polyclonal antibodies against extracted vegetative cell antigens.
Journal of Applied Bacteriology, *66*, (1989), 419-432.

e. Detection of Spores of Bacillus anthracis using the Polymerase Chain Reaction.
Journal of Infectious Diseases, *165* (1992), 1145-8.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what experiments his Department has carried out on the chemical agent phencyclidine; when and where the experiments were carried out; and if the results of the experiments were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia (Question 12, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Research into phencyclidine at the then Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down started in 1963 with a study to assess the behavioural effects of phencyclidine in rats and to compare the results with other Psychotomimetics including LSD. The information gained has formed part of the chemical and biological defence programme which has been the subject of information exchange and collaboration with the United States Department of Defense on a continuing basis. This information was exchanged under the aegis of the defence agreements referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, The Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP, in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

Letter from G. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what stocks of toxins have been transferred from the United States of America Department of Defense to the Ministry of Defence or British scientific research institutions since 1979; from which United States of America Department of Defense establishments these toxins have been transferred; and under which international defence agreements these toxins have been transferred (Question 13, Order Paper 4 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of the materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. Since 1979 a small quantity of shellfish toxin has been received from the US Army Chemical Research, Development and Engineering Center at Edgewood, Maryland as well as a small quantity of Clostridium perfringens beta-toxin from the US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases. The quantities in both cases were extremely small and would not be regarded as stocks of toxins. These transfers from the United States of America Department of Defense to the Ministry of Defence and more specifically the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down took place under the defence agreements referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, The Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP in his reply of 21 May 1992, *Official Report*, columns 255-256.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of the quadrupartite working party on nuclear biological and chemical defence of the United Kingdom—United States of America—Canada—Australia Armies agreement since 1978; on which dates and locations the working party has met; and which Ministry of Defence branches took part in these meetings.

Mr. Aitken: The quadripartite working party meets to negotiate and maintain agreements on standardisation of operational procedures and equipment.

Dates and locations of QWP meetings since 1978 are as follows:

Date	*Location*
8–17 May 1978	Canada
30 October–8 November 1979	United States of America
12-21 May 1981	United Kingdom
3–9 November 1982	Australia
11–17 June 1984	Canada
12–18 November 1985	United States of America
17–23 June 1987	United Kingdom
19–25 October 1988	Australia
30 May–5 June 1990	Canada
8–15 October 1991	Australia
21–27 April 1993	United Kingdom

Representatives of the following branches of my Department have attended the quadripartite working party:

Operational Requirements Branches: most recently, Director Operational Requirements (Joint Systems) and Director Clothing and Textiles.

Researches Branches: Atomic Weapons Establishment and Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

Army policy/concepts Branch: Director Doctrine Army now Director Land Warfare.
Procurement Executive Branch: most recently, Programme Director Light weapons systems.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when information about the L9A1 hand-held aerosol dispenser was exchanged between Britain and other countries under the defence agreements outlined in the *Official Report*, 21 May 1992, columns *255-56*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No such exchange took place.

Battle of the Atlantic (Anniversary)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Merseyside during the 50th anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic and the western approaches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend plans to visit Merseyside at the end of the month to attend events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to what the operational sortie requirements were for the Royal Air Force rescue helicopter that flew very low over the village of Clayton, south Yorkshire at approximately 15.48 hours on 25 April.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The search-and-rescue (SAR) Sea King helicopter from RAF Leconfield was returning to the station from a call-out in Morcambe bay. As the aircraft was on standby to provide SAR cover in the area, and because of the prevailing low cloud, the crew were routed to the north of Sheffield and authorised to fly at low level.

Nuclear Weapons, Tibet

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as regards *(a)* the testing and *(b)* deployment of nuclear weapons in Tibet by China.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no evidence that China has tested or deployed nuclear weapons in Tibet.

Confidence and Security Building

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current total of inspections carried out by the United Kingdom as part of the confidence and security-building measures agreements; which countries have been visited; what problems have occurred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have carried out 10 confidence and security-building measures evaluations and three inspections. The evaluations were conducted in the then Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, and Ukraine, with inspections in Belarus and Russia. Although there have been on occasions some minor logistical difficulties, no problems of substance have arisen.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many practice inspections have been carried out by the United Kingdom as part of the preparation for the full implementation of the conventional forces in Europe treaty; what problems have arisen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Twenty-one practice inspections have been carried out by the United Kingdom. Although there have been on occasion some teething difficulties, no problems of substance have arisen.

Military Information (Exchanges)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what exchanges of military information have occurred as a result of the signing of the Vienna document in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As a result of the signing of the Vienna document in 1990, and its successor Vienna document in 1992, three exchanges of military information have taken place. These consist of the command organisation and location of land and air forces, including personnel and equipment holdings, as well as plans for the deployment of new equipment and weapon systems in the following 12 months.

Belize

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent consideration he has given to changing the level of British forces in Belize.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are in consultation with the Government of Belize about the British military presence there. The British Government expect to make a statement shortly.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what type of training has been given to units due to be deployed for duties with UNPROFOR II; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Extensive refresher training in basic skills is undertaken by any unit preparing to undertake an emergency tour. In the case of 1st Prince of Wales Own Battalion group, additional specialised training included route clearing and anti-ambush drills, convoy control and driving techniques. Some basic language training as well as briefing on the background to the conflict were also included.

Negretti Aviation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts have been let with Negretti Aviation in the last three years.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Total number of contracts*	*Total value of contracts*
1992-93	88	£6,567,649
1991-92	84	£4,449,184
1990-91	67	£1,556,308

Details of the subject matter of individual contracts are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Aerospace Equipment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regard he pays in his defence procurement policy to the preservation of a defence industrial base capable of producing defence aerospace equipment.

Mr. Aitken: We believe it is important to retain a viable and effective defence industry, in aerospace as in other sectors, and our procurement policy has achieved this. We give due weight in procurement decisions to their wider industrial and technological implications.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representation his Department had at the first preparatory committee meeting in New York on 10 to 14 May for the fifth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department is being represented at official level.

Amphibious Helicopter Carrier

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made in assessing the tenders for the amphibious helicopter carrier.

Mr. Aitken: I refer my hon. Friend to the pursuant reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) yesterday.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 May 1993

EMPLOYMENT

School Leavers

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list for each year since 1988 the number of pupils in Greater London reaching the minimum school leaving age and the number who entered employment directly, entered a youth training scheme on leaving school, returned for a further period at school, or entered a further education college; and if she will provide such estimates as are available for the same figures for 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is compiled by United Kingdom heads of careers services on behalf of the careers service. It is given in the table. This information is not yet available for 1992 and 1993. Information for 1988 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Numbers of pupils leaving secondary school at minimum school leaving age in inner and outer London and their destinations for the years 1989-91

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Full-time education	32,790	31,800	38,200
Youth training[1]	4,050	3,070	2,920
Employment	12,550	9,030	4,520
Not in any[2]	3,180	4,300	6,260
Unknown[3]	8,490	6,130	6,050
Total	60,620	54,160	57,950

Source: School Leavers' Destinations Survey.
Figures rounded to nearest 10.
[1] Including those on YT with employed status and those using training credits.
[2] May be unemployed or not available for work for any of a wide range of reasons.
[3] Those who failed to let the careers service or school know what they were doing and who failed to respond to at least two attempts at follow-up by the careers office.

EDUCATION

Infant Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many four-year-olds were in classes in infant schools in England, excluding four-year-olds in nursery classes of infant schools or in nursery schools in 1987 and 1991; and what percentage this was of the age group.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the table.

Pupils aged 4 attending infant classes in maintained infant schools in England.
Position as at January each year.

	Number of pupils aged four[1]	*As a percentage of the four year old population*[2]
1987	71,025	18
1991	76,703	18

[1] Ages as at previous 31 August—excluding the rising fives who by January will have reached the age of five.
[2] Based on the estimated four-year-old population as at previous 31 August—again excluding the rising fives.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) when he intends to complete his consideration of the responses to his consultation letter on the sale of school playing fields;

(2) if he will publish a full list of the organisations and individuals to whom his consultation letter on the sale of school playing fields was sent, the date on which the letter was sent to each organisation and individual and the date on which a response from each organisation and individual was received by his Department; and if he will place copies of each response in the Library;

(3) how many organisations have not responded to his consultation letter on the sale of school playing fields; what action he has taken to pursue those organisations for responses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend expects to inform local education authorities and others of his conclusions arising from this exercise shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, wrote to the local authority associations on 19 December 1991 asking for their comments on his proposed letter to chief education officers by 28 February 1992. Copies of the consultation letter were also sent on 20 December 1991 to the Sports Council, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the National Playing Fields Association and the regional councils for sport and recreation for information.

Following is a list of the bodies which commented on the consultation letter and the dates of their replies:

	Date
Association of District Councils	26 February 1992
Association of Metropolitan Authorities	February 1992
Association of County Councils	February 1992
Association of London Authorities	24 February 1992
The Sports Council	28 February 1992
National Playing Fields Association	5 March 1992
The Central Council of Physical Recreation	16 January 1992
Chiltern District Council	13 February 1992
Cornwall County Council	25 February 1992
Dorset County Council	26 February 1992
ACRE: The Rural Communities Charity	28 February 1992
Somerset County Council	4 March 1992

It is not our normal practice to place responses to consultations in the Library.

No response was received from the London Boroughs Association. My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble wrote to the chairman of the association, on 19 December 1991, and a further copy of his letter was sent

to the association on 6 February 1992. Officials subsequently telephoned the association to ask whether a response would be forthcoming; a representative confirmed that the association did not intend to respond.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a full list of those local education authorities which have actively demonstrated that, in considering whether to retain playing fields released by a school proposed for closure, they have considered whether such playing fields should be retained to make up shortfalls at a neighbouring school, the method by which such consideration has been demonstrated, the total number of schools that have been subject to such consideration, the total number of schools at which the playing field has subsequently been released and the total number of schools at which the playing field has subsequently been retained.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available. Local education authorities are not required to provide such information when submitting proposals for school closure to my right hon. Friend.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 April to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), *Official Report*, column *508*, if the representations he has received supporting the need to use the tax system to help fulfil the Government's Rio commitment have *(a)* specifically supported the use of value added tax as the instrument to do so, *(b)* supported the imposition of VAT on standing charges or *(c)* proposed alternative ways of using the tax system in this regard.

Sir John Cope: A number of representations my right hon. Friend received specifically supported the use of VAT as an instrument to help fulfil the United Kingdom's Rio commitment. For example, the Friends of the Earth said in its Budget briefing

"Friends of the Earth therefore welcomes the Chancellor's commitment to increasing domestic fuel and power prices over the next two years through the gradual imposition of VAT."

Standing charges were not mentioned in any representations, and alternative ways of using the tax system were proposed in some of the representations received.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to impose value added tax on newspapers, periodicals, books or other publications; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend's plans for VAT changes are set out in the Budget and the Finance (No. 2) Bill and do not extend VAT in this area.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Inland Revenue rules regarding taxation on those resident in the United Kingdom for more than 183 days a year; and what steps are being taken to deal with evasion.

Mr. Dorrell: Under section 336 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, an individual who is present in the United Kingdom for 183 days or more in a tax year is treated as resident for tax purposes for that year. The Inland Revenue reviews the residence status of individuals, where appropriate, as part of its general compliance responsibilities.

Profit-related Pay

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy in respect of companies cutting basic pay in order to increase the tax-free element through profit-related pay.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's purpose in introducing tax relief for profit-related pay—PRP—was to encourage flexibility in pay determination arrangements. The tax relief, subject to certain limits, is available only for PRP schemes which satisfy certain legislative requirements. Responsibility for the detailed terms of specific employment contracts rests with the parties themselves.

Unitary Taxation

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has received from United States Treasury Secretary Bentsen to his representations about unitary taxation.

Mr. Lamont: United States Secretary Bentsen has explained the United States Adminstration's position. He and his colleagues recognise the importance the British Government attach to this issue, the strength of feeling in the United Kingdom and the risk of retaliatory action by the United Kingdom if a satisfactory solution is not forthcoming. He has assured me that the Administration are very keen to find a solution to this problem that is acceptable. I have said that the Government are ready to discuss how an acceptable solution could best be achieved. But I have informed him that the Government will have to take retaliatory measures in relation to United States based companies if there is not a satisfactory resolution of the problem of the internationally opposed unitary tax on foreign-owned companies in California by the end of this year. Meanwhile, I have instructed the Inland Revenue to obtain information from California-based companies in the United Kingdom on the probable impact of such retaliatory measures.

ENVIRONMENT

Low Frequency Noise

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in which year his Department first became aware of the hum noise complaint relating to low frequency noise; if he will make a statement concerning the action by his Department since that time to investigate this complaint; and what results were obtained.

Mr. Maclean: My Department first became aware of the problem of low frequency noise in the late 1970s. The independent noise review conducted for my Department in 1990 observed that this was a difficult area in terms of measurement, individual sensitivity and identification of sources. It recommended full support for the programme of research being conducted for the Department by the Building Research Establishment which is due to be completed early next year. Complaints about low

frequency noise are investigated by local authorities under part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in the same way as other noise complaints.

Fanfare for a New World

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to account for the losses incurred by the Merseyside development corporation in subsidising the Fanfare for a New World concert.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has asked Merseyside development corporation's auditors, in their examination of the accounts for last year, to look specifically at the issue of the corporation's sponsorship of the concert; we await the outcome of this examination.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to restructure the Merseyside development corporation.

Mr. Robin Squire: In 1991 a financial management and policy review—FMPR—was carried out at Merseyside development corporation, as part of the Department's role in sponsoring non-departmental public bodies. The FMPR was based on four studies covering management, staffing, audit and pay and conditions. As the FMPR resulted in changes within the MDC's structure, there are no further proposals for any more changes.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an audit of the finances of the Merseyside development corporation.

Mr. Robin Squire: Merseyside development corporation is subject to an annual audit by independent external auditors, appointed by the Secretary of State. The auditors' report is published in the corporation's annual report. A full copy of the financial statements is available from the corporation on request.

New Housing

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new housing starts there were for the first three months of 1993 and for the corresponding period in 1992.

Mr. Baldry: Provisional figures show that there were 43,900 housebuilding starts in Great Britain during the first three months of 1993 compared with 41,100 starts during the corresponding period of 1992.

This increase is an expression of growing confidence by the building industry in the market for new houses. Taken with recent evidence of rising house prices and increased activity by estate agents, there are now signs of a recovery in the housing market.

Association of Environmental Consultants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from the Association of Environmental Consultants on its new code of practice.

Mr. Maclean: My officials have received a copy of the code of practice. I welcome this example of self-regulation by a group of prominent companies and I am sure that it will help to encourage public confidence in their work.

Ozone Levels

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when and where World Health Organisation air quality guidelines for ozone levels have been exceeded since 1987.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* There are two World Health Organisation Guidelines for the protection of human health, a one-hour guideline of 76-100ppb and an eight-hour guideline of 50ppb. There are two guidelines for the protection of plants and crops, a daily mean of 33ppb and a growing season mean of 30ppb.

Ozone monitoring has been carried out since 1987 at 16 United Kingdom sites in the Department's network. Between 1987 and 1991 the guidelines were exceeded on at least one occasion at each site. Ozone levels in the United Kingdom are, however, among the lowest in Europe.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response the Government have made to the proposals for policy objectives on affordable rented housing put forward by the Churches National Housing Coalition in its document circulated to hon. Members.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The Government have noted with interest the points made by the Churches National Housing Coalition. The coalition's proposals concerned supply and choice of housing; homelessness and targeting resources. In all these areas we are already making significant progress.

The Government's aim is to ensure that a decent home is within the reach of every family.

We have taken steps to increase the supply of low-cost housing where it is needed. The housing market measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the autumn statement mean that the public resources available to housing associations, the main providers of new social housing, increased from £935 million in 1989-90 to £1·8 billion in 1993-94, making some 54,500 new homes available. In addition, the temporary relaxation of the rules governing local authority receipts, for the period November 1992 to December 1993, gives local authorities greatly increased spending power for projects such as the renovation of their housing stock.

Greater choice and efficiency are key elements of Government policy. We have taken measures to encourage the revival of the private rented sector; to give public sector tenants greater control over the management of their homes; to encourage more efficient management in the social sector; as well as promoting home ownership.

Under the rough sleepers initiative, £96 million was made available from 1990-91 to 1992-93 to provide additional hostel and longer-term accommodation in central London, where the problem is most acute. A further £86 million is available over three financial years, from April 1993-94 to 1995-96 build on the success of this initiative.

We believe that it is a more efficient use of resources to target subsidy towards people rather than simply into "bricks and mortar", so that the public subsidy reaches those individuals who need it most. Our policies on spending in the social sector reflect that.

In addition, home ownership continues to hold a central place in our housing policy. The right to buy for council housing, as well as our rent-to-mortgages proposals; cash incentive schemes to enable public sector tenants to move out into owner-occupation; and shared ownership schemes are all important parts of our commitment to help those who want to own their own homes to do so.

River Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to publish an account of progress in the implementation of recommendations made after major disasters recommended in the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport gave on 11 May, *Official Report*, column *380*.

Environmental Damage

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what study he is making of the legal liability resulting from transboundary environmental damage.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 May 1993]:* This matter is considered whenever it is raised in the development, application or revision of the relevant international environmental legal instruments.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will use the next appropriate legislative opportunity to give the Crown Estate Commissioners a statutory duty to further the conservation of the terrestrial and maritime environment.

Mr. Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to introduce such legislation.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Crown Estate Commissioners are subject to the environmental provisions of section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968; and whether those provisions extend to their functions below the low water mark.

Mr. Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

The Crown Estate Commissioners' environmental and conservation policy applies the provisions of section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968 to their ownership both of land and of the sea bed below the low water mark.

SCOTLAND

Council Tax

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the overstepping of maximum charges for bands in the transitional reduction scheme of the council tax; and what proposals he has to prevent such occurrence.

Mr. Lang: I have received a number of representations from MPs and members of the public about the difference between the actual council tax, set by local authorities, and the adjusted council tax used by local authorities to calculate entitlement to transitional reduction.

The sole purpose of the transitional reduction scheme is to moderate increases in local tax bills arising as a consequence of the change in tax system and it is not intended to protect taxpayers from increases arising for other reasons. The level of adjusted council tax used to determine relief is calculated according to a prescribed formula. This formula takes account of what each local authority might need to spend on services in 1993-94 but makes no allowance for past deficits and assumes a council tax collection level of 98 per cent. Where local authorities budget responsibly and have good records of tax collection, the actual and adjusted taxes should be very close to each other and may be identical. This is the case in a number of areas in Scotland. Where this is not the case, taxpayers may wish to ask their local authority for an explanation.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to waive or curtail the operation of the planning processes relating to planning and development proposals from Highland regional council in respect of work to be carried out in the Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin areas as a result of the building of the Skye bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans to alter the planning processes in respect of Highland regional council's proposals.

Scottish Transport Group

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to privatise the Scottish Transport Group; what estimate of asset proceeds he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The disposal programme covering the undertakings of the Scottish Transport Group was published on 6 February 1990. The major part of this programme, the disposal of the 10 former subsidiaries of the Scottish Bus Group, has been successfully completed. My reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 2 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *45-46*, gave details of the proceeds from the sale of the Scottish Bus Group. The Scottish Transport Group will be wound up in due course after the disposal of its remaining property assets and the winding up of its pension funds. Estimates of likely proceeds from the remaining assets are commercially confidential.

Forestry

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 April, *Official Report*, columns *89-90*, whether any additional person or persons have attended or are expected to attend any meeting of the forestry review group.

Sir Hector Monro: Members of the forestry review group may be represented by alternates from their Departments. No persons other than members or their alternates have attended meetings.

Oil and Gas

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people employed in *(a)* onshore and *(b)* offshore oil and gas-related activity in (i) 1991 and (ii) 1992; and what is his estimate of the total at the latest available date.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The latest available information on the number of people employed offshore in the oil and gas sector in the northern North sea is for September 1991 when it was estimated at between 26,400 and 27,950.

There are no estimates of oil and gas related employment for onshore workers alone for either 1991 or 1992. The latest information available relating to the number of people employed onshore and offshore in companies with turnover in excess of 80 per cent. related to oil and gas sector is for June 1992. On that basis, the estimate was 82,800, compared to 83,400 in June 1990.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Exports to Iran

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has received on the trading activities of Seaconsar Far East Ltd. of Hong Kong in relation to British exports to Iran.

Mr. Needham: Information supplied to my Department about the trading activities of companies is treated as commercially confidential.

Council of Industry Ministers

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community Council of Industry Ministers held on 4 May.

Mr. Sainsbury: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of European Community Industry Ministers held in Brussels on 4 May.

The most important item on the agenda was restructuring of the EC steel industry where I underlined the importance of keeping up the momentum of the discussions with industry to ensure that a definitive programme of capacity reductions is in place before the 30 September deadline set by the Industry Council in February. I emphasised that a successful restructuring plan is dependent on strict control of state aids to the industry, a point with which Vice-President Van Miert fully agreed. With support from a number of other member states, I argued for the European Coal and Steel Community levy to be phased out rapidly and the Danish presidency hoped that decisions could be taken by the end of the year.

The Council agreed in principle to extend the provisions of the seventh directive on aid to the shipbuilding industry to the end of 1994.

There was discussion of measures to support small and medium enterprises with a decision that a single programme should commence in July this year, subject to agreement on the detail of the text.

The Commission, at the United Kingdom's instigation, made a presentation of the progress towards accomplishing the tasks set out in the Council resolution on administrative simplification agreed during the United Kingdom presidency. The United Kingdom had placed this important topic on the agenda to keep up the momentum of the Commission's work in this area. The Commission's action should help to ensure that burdens on British business are minimised.

We also tabled a paper, which was supported by a number of other member states, outlining our concern about the damage to the United Kingdom's recycling industry caused by German packaging waste legislation. The Danish presidency hoped that progress could be made at the June Environment Council on the packaging waste directive as a Community solution to some aspects of this problem.

The Council also held a wide-ranging debate on the link between industrial competitiveness and environmental protection. We consider this link to be important and will continue to work with the Commission and other member states so that the relationship between industrial competitiveness and environmental protection is taken into account when formulating policies.

BNFL Office, South Korea

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the role of the BNFL office in South Korea; and what reassessment has been undertaken of its role in the context of discussions on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* It is for BNFL to decide on its commercial representation overseas. The Republic of Korea is a state party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and has concluded a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Any business undertaken by BNFL will take place in accordance with the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaty.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact on the number of areas in London eligible for assisted status if each London borough were treated as a travel-to-work area.

Mr. Sainsbury: Designating assisted areas depends on the criteria set out in the consultation paper issued in June 1992. These criteria will be considered for all travel-to-work areas. For very large travel-to-work areas, including London, the situation in their constituent parts is also being considered.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals his Department has submitted to the European Commission for a new assisted areas map; and when he plans to submit further proposals.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 May 1993]:* The Government's full proposals for the new assisted areas map will be submitted to the European Commission shortly. Proposals for enhanced assisted area status for the Barnsley, Doncaster and Mansfield travel-to-work areas, which formed part of the package of support measures for coal closure areas announced by my right hon. Friend last October, were cleared with the European Commission beforehand. Additionally, my statement about Swan

Hunter on 12 May indicated that the Newcastle and South Tyneside travel-to-work areas would remain as development areas, subject to European Commission approval: discussion with the Commission on this point is now under way.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the non-governmental public bodies operational in Wales indicating *(a)* the total number of Government appointees, *(b)* the number of Welsh-speaking appointees, *(c)* the total number of staff employed, *(d)* the number of Welsh-speaking staff and *(e)* the number of staff within each body that have received paid leave to attend courses to learn Welsh for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 23 March 1993 at columns *549-50*, listing the public bodies to which I make appointments. As some people hold more than one appointment, the number of appointees is 960. Of these, 129 have indicated on their nomination form that they speak Welsh. However, this information is not provided in all cases. Only executive non-departmental public bodies employ staff, and the information requested is shown in the table.

Non-departmental public body (NDPB)	*Number of staff*	*Number of Welsh speaking staff*	*Number of staff received paid leave to learn Welsh (1992-93)*
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	86·5	4	21
Countryside Council for Wales	299·0	75	81
Curriculum Council for Wales	26·0	10	4
Development Board for Rural Wales	124·0	36	[1]15
Higher and Further Education Funding Councils	42·0	8	0
Housing for Wales	75·0	20	[1]2
Land Authority for Wales	43·0	Not known	0
National Library of Wales	215·0	199	3
National Museum of Wales	499·0	157	21
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales	35·0	10	6
Sports Council for Wales	147·0	27	0
Wales Tourist Board	109·0	46	3
Wales Youth Agency	10·0	4	[2]—
Welsh Development Agency	442·0	40	37
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	31·0	5	0

[1] In-house tuition also provided.
[2] Private tutor visits office weekly.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *523*, what conclusions he has now drawn about travel times from the specified communities to Bridgend and Barry, following his discussions on 23 April.

Mr. David Hunt: The length of time taken for residents of these communities to reach Bridgend and Barry would vary according to such things as the route taken and the means of transport used.

Housing Needs Assessment

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to establish a national housing needs assessment mechanism in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to make his Department's housing needs assessment research in Wales available for public scrutiny.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Housing Management Advisory Panel for Wales has just published "Taking Stock: A Guide to Local Housing Assessment".

Epilepsy

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he intends to take following the recent seminars on epilepsy in Wales regarding *(a)* dissemination of the conclusions of the report, "Epilepsy, in Wales—a Study of the Needs of People with Epilepsy, Current Services and of Potential Developments", *(b)* the identification of potential strategies for development of support services and *(c)* the current and potential roles and responsibilities of voluntary, statutory and professional agencies.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The seminars were paid for by the Welsh Office as part of our further consultations to assist consideration of this matter. The report of the seminars has only recently been received and is being carefully studied.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority the number of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* nursery nurses and *(c)* teachers' aides employed who are disabled.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Immunisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of babies were immunised and vaccinated in each family health service authority area in the last year for which statistics are available and the two previous years; and if he will provide a similar list for those children receiving their booster vaccination and immunisation injections.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information relating to children immunised is collected by health authorities. The percentage of children resident at the end of the year in question and who had been immunised by their second birthday is given in the tables.

Information on the number of booster vaccinations is not collected in such a manner that would enable the Department to calculate a percentage of children vaccinated by a given birthday. However, the tables show the number of children aged four and under who received booster/reinforcing doses in each of the last three years, based on the district in which the dose was given rather than the district in which the child was resident. These figures do not represent the number of children who had received a booster/reinforcing dose by the age of four and under, as a child would be included in the figures only for the year in which the dose was given.

Number of children who received booster/reinforcing doses

	Diphtheria	*Tetanus*	*Polio*
1989-90:			
Clwyd	2,448	2,454	2,444
East Dyfed	2,125	2,127	2,125
Gwent	4,384	4,387	4,398
Gwynedd	1,311	1,317	1,305
Mid Glamorgan	2,546	2,559	2,544
Pembrokeshire	686	689	690
Powys	703	703	708
South Glamorgan	4,110	4,116	4,127
West Glamorgan	2,792	2,787	2,800
1990-91:			
Clwyd	3,281	3,284	3,279
East Dyfed	2,376	2,379	2,372
Gwent	4,866	4,866	4,883
Gwynedd	2,156	2,163	2,158
Mid Glamorgan	5,366	5,364	5,374
Pembrokeshire	1,510	1,509	1,513
Powys	1,570	1,572	1,572
South Glamorgan	4,342	4,344	4,353
West Glamorgan	4,154	4,154	4,155
1991-92:			
Clwyd	3,525	3,526	3,537
East Dyfed	2,503	2,504	2,495
Gwent	5,261	5,263	5,269
Gwynedd	2,407	2,411	2,410
Mid Glamorgan	5,796	5,797	5,810
Pembrokeshire	1,447	1,447	1,448
Powys	1,407	1,407	1,408
South Glamorgan	4,884	4,886	4,884
West Glamorgan	4,193	4,199	4,197

Percentage of children immunised by their 2nd birthday

	Diphtheria	*Tetanus*	*Pertussis*	*Polio*	*Measles*
1989-90					
Clwyd	91·8	91·8	79·2	91·9	85·0
East Dyfed	90·8	90·9	67·6	90·8	83·1
Gwent	90·4	90·4	69·9	90·6	82·1
Gwynedd	94·4	94·5	73·1	94·6	87·1
Mid Glamorgan	89·0	89·1	65·4	89·3	76·9
Pembrokeshire	93·8	93·9	82·1	93·6	86·5
Powys	95·0	95·3	78·3	95·2	91·1
South Glamorgan	86·6	86·6	72·4	86·5	75·2
West Glamorgan	90·7	90·7	69·5	90·9	81·7
1990-91					
Clwyd	93·9	93·9	85·0	94·0	88·2
East Dyfed	94·3	94·3	75·3	94·1	88·0
Gwent	92·2	92·2	75·5	92·4	85·9
Gwynedd	94·9	94·9	80·0	95·0	88·3
Mid Glamorgan	92·1	92·2	75·0	92·2	82·6
Pembrokeshire	95·4	95·4	86·9	95·5	91·8
Powys	96·6	96·7	85·8	96·9	92·2
South Glamorgan	90·6	90·7	77·9	90·6	83·7
West Glamorgan	91·3	91·3	76·9	91·2	83·6
1991-92					
Clwyd	94·8	94·8	89·1	94·8	90·5
East Dyfed	95·0	95·0	81·6	95·1	91·5
Gwent	91·1	91·1	78·5	92·4	86·9
Gwynedd	96·1	96·2	86·6	96·2	92·4
Mid Glamorgan	93·0	93·1	80·5	93·3	86·6
Pembrokeshire	95·2	95·2	89·2	96·1	92·0
Powys	96·1	96·1	89·6	96·1	92·3
South Glamorgan	93·0	93·0	84·9	94·4	88·3
West Glamorgan	93·1	93·1	83·2	94·4	89·0

Tourism

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new initiatives the Welsh tourist board will be embarking on in the summer of 1993 to attract visitors to Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The WTB has launched a major new £2·5 million advertising and promotional campaign for 1993-94 as part of its ongoing marketing strategy to support the tourism industry in Wales. This includes television advertisements, campaign posters, direct mailing/response advertising for the autumn, main and spring seasons. In addition to this, the WTB has earmarked nearly £800,000 for campaigns in selected overseas target markets with a much greater emphasis on European database marketing activities.

Elderly People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on how many people over the age of 65 years live alone in Wales; and how many people aged 65 years or more living alone have suffered from dementia in each of the last five years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The 1991 census recorded that there were 174,049 persons of pensionable age living alone in Wales. Information on those over the age of 65 years living alone is not available. Information on the number of people aged 65 years or more living alone who have suffered from dementia is not available centrally.

Pollution, Pontypool

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many copies of his Department's report on polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins and furans in the Pontypool environment—the Panteg monitoring project—have been printed; and to whom it has been distributed.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Two hundred. Copies were provided for local Members of Parliament; the Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs; the EEC; the regulatory authorities; ReChem International Ltd; Torfaen borough council; property holders in the Panteg area on whose land significant testing had been carried out and the secretary of Mothers and Children against Toxic Waste.

The Welsh Office is also making the report available to other interested parties at £25 each.

Public Appointments

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies in Wales, for which he advises on the membership; and if he will list the members so appointed;

(2) if he will list the members of all the non-departmental public bodies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 23 March 1993 at columns *549-50*, listing current appointments I have made to public bodies in Wales. Information on appointments made by other Government Ministers is contained in "Public Bodies 1992" available in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to the report by the Social Security Consortium entitled "The Social Fund: Failing the Poorest", a copy of which has been sent to him; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement on the findings of the report.

Mr. Scott: We have noted the report, which is based on the research we commissioned from York university's social policy research unit—SPRU. We are carefully considering the operation of the social fund in response to the SPRU research, along with a number of other authoritative reports and our own close monitoring of the fund.

Methods of Payment

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce financial inducements to pensioners and other benefit recipients to obtain their benefits through banks rather than post offices.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no such plans.

Severe Hardship Claims

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table listing the number of severe hardship claims made and awards granted for each of the last 12 quarters in each district.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 12 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will publish a table listing the number of severe hardship claims made and awards granted for each of the last twelve quarters in each district.

The complete range of information you have requested is not available except at a disproportionate cost. This is primarily because statistics regarding severe hardship claims are maintained clerically and not in the format requested. Additionally, the Benefits Agency district arrangements were introduced only in April 1991, and statistics prior to this relate to the former local office structure.

I have, however, appended the national figures for Severe Hardship claims and awards for the period requested. I should emphasise that these relate to claims made rather than individual customers.

I hope you find this reply helpful. Copies of this letter will be placed in the Library.

National severe hardship claims and awards

Quarter ending	*Number of claims*	*Number successful*
June 1990	6,573	4,600
September 1990	7,417	5,329
December 1990	6,558	4,952

Quarter ending	Number of claims	Number successful
March 1991	10,699	8,050
June 1991	13,031	10,356
September 1991	16,269	13,021
December 1991	15,163	12,372
March 1992	23,539	19,646
June 1992	25,258	20,716
September 1992	28,160	23,127
December 1992	25,107	19,917
March 1993	36,937	30,839

Income Support

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest available figures for *(a)* income support recipients, *(b)* those in receipt of a family premium and *(c)* those in receipt of lone-parent premiums in the district council areas of Derbyshire.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 12 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will give the latest available figures for (a) Income Support recipients, (b) those in receipt of a family premium and (c) those in receipt of lone parent premiums in the district council areas of Derbyshire.

The complete range of information you have requested is not available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. This is because information regarding the number of Income Support recipients is not collected on the basis of district council areas. Additionally, statistics are not routinely collected that reflect the number of customers in receipt of a family premium.

Information concerning lone parent premiums and the number of Income Support recipients in the Benefits Agency's offices in Derbyshire is in the Official Report Vol. 224 Col. 300.

However, estimates of the numbers of recipients receiving family premium and lone parent premium nationally are available from the Annual Statistical Enquiry (ASE). This is a point in time survey based on a one per cent. sample of all people in receipt of Income Support.

The latest information from the ASE relates to May 1991. The estimates from this were 4,487,000 recipients of Income Support, 1,318,000 recipients of the family premium and 871,000 recipients of the lone parent premium.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest available figures for *(a)* claimants, *(b)* adult dependants who are in receipt of income support and *(c)* the number of children in such households in the district council areas of Derbyshire.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 12 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will give the latest available figures of *(a)* claimants, *(b)* adult dependants who are in receipt of Income Support and *(c)* the number of children in such households in the district council areas of Derbyshire.

The complete range of information you have requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This is because information regarding the number of Income Support recipients, their children or adult dependants, is not collected on the basis of district council areas. However, information concerning the number of Income Support recipients by Benefits Agency office in Derbyshire can be found in the Library.

Estimates of the numbers of adult dependants and children nationally are available from the Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry (ASE). This is a point in time survey based on a one per cent. sample of all people in receipt of Income Support.

The latest information from the ASE related to May 1991. The estimates from this were 4,487,000 recipients of Income Support, 763,000 partners, 2,368,000 children under 16 and 129,000 dependants aged between 16 and 19.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals living in the Falkland Islands are currently in receipt of a British state retirement pension; what would be the additional cost of granting them inflation-proofed pensions; and if he will seek to conclude as soon as possible a reciprocal agreement in respect of the Falkland Islands.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* In December 1991, the latest date for which figures are currently available, 14 people resident in the Falkland Islands were receiving United Kingdom retirement pensions. The additional cost of paying them inflation-proofed pensions would be approximately £11,000 per year, at 1992 rates. However, any concession on indexation for the Falklands would lead inevitably to pressure to treat pensioners living in other countries in the same way. To inflation-proof United Kingdom pensions worldwide, for the 355,000 British pensioners who do not receive index-linked payments, would cost some £275 million a year. We therefore have no plans to conclude a reciprocal agreement with the Falkland Islands.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rabies

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to revise the legal provisions and the inspections practice of Her Majesty's Customs to keep rabies and other notifiable diseases out of the United Kingdom following the opening of the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: An order will shortly be presented to the House which will provide the legal backing for policing and frontier controls in respect of the channel tunnel. The order will not introduce any new rabies control measures,

but will adapt our current procedures at ports of entry around the United Kingdom to the unique physical circumstances of the channel tunnel. Animal health controls at the channel tunnel and its terminals will be just as strict as those presently in force at sea ports and airports. In addition, the channel tunnel concessionaires have established a number of preventive measures to prevent animals entering the tunnel, and more will be put in place once the tunnel is operational.

Ozone Depletion

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been commissioned by the Government on the implications of the depletion of the ozone layer for agriculture in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: The Government will be spending over £0·5 million in 1993-94 on research to examine the effects of ultra-violet-B—UV-B—radiation on agricultural crops. The project sponsors, titles, contractors and estimated costs for 1993-94 are as follows:

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Effects of UV-B irradiation on cell cycle gene expression and DNA repair in developing wheat (Tricticum aestivum L.) leaves
University of Manchester, with Horticulture Research International.
£54,000.

The molecular basis of UV-B perception and response in plants.
University of Glasgow.
£38,000.

Molecular mechanisms involved in UV-B induced changes in gene expression for photosynthetic proteins.
Horticulture Research International.
£43,000.

The interactions of enhanced UV-B and water stress on oil seed rape cultivars with differing UV-B sensitivity.
University of Cambridge.
£67,000.

Characterise the molecular basis of gene regulation by environmental stress, including UV-B.
Horticulture Research International.
£167,000 (1992-93 cost. 1993-94 estimated cost is unavailable).

Department of the Environment

Impact of increased UV-B radiation (the impacts of UV-B on natural and cultivated vegetation in the United Kingdom; mapping the risk of UV-B impacts on cultivated and natural vegetation in the United Kingdom; and, the impacts of UV-B on plant pathogens and host-pathogen interactions).
University of Lancaster.
£84,000.

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Responses of crops to UV-B radiation.
University of Lancaster, with Horticulture Research International.
£74,000.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether foot and mouth disease was present in any of the countries from which the imported cattle, currently subject to his Ministry's attempts to trace those which have been vaccinated, have originated; how many of the animals imported into the United Kingdom have not yet been traced; and what factors are responsible for the time it is taking to locate the remaining suspect animals.

Mr. Gummer: There have been no confirmed reports of the presence of foot and mouth disease in either the Czech Republic or in Poland in recent years.

The vast majority of Czech cattle, for which the tracing exercise began first, have now been located and good progress is being made in tracing the Polish cattle.

Some difficulties have been experienced in tracing those animals which have passed through the hands of several owners since they were originally imported. Tracing has also been made more difficult by the keeping of poor movement records by some owners and some retagging of livestock following change of ownership.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the last consignment of livestock suspected of having been vaccinated against foot and mouth disease was received into the United Kingdom; and after what period of time there is no risk of a latent carrier of the disease transmitting that disease to other animals.

Mr. Gummer: The last consignment of livestock suspected of having been vaccinated against foot and mouth disease—FMD—arrived in this country on 25 March 1993. All imported FMD-seropositive animals have been inspected by the State Veterinary Service. There is no evidence of clinical disease in any of the animals or suggestion that any of the animals are carriers. Studies elsewhere have shown that carrier animals may be the source of subsequent disease outbreaks up to two and a half years after the carrier animal was first infected.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to ensure that any animal slaughtered because of vaccination for foot and mouth will be destroyed and not allowed to enter the food chain.

Mr. Gummer: All animals found to be vaccinated against FMD will be either re-exported or slaughtered. There is no risk to public health from vaccinated animals entering the food chain.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to ensure that farmers who came to be in possession of vaccinated cattle are not made responsible for meeting the direct losses incurred.

Mr. Gummer: The resolution of the problem is a commercial matter and it is for the current owners and importers to come to a mutually acceptable arrangement with the exporter in the country of origin for the animals' re-export or slaughter.

Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the working party on naturally occurring toxicants in food to complete its study of pyrrolizidine alkaloids in milk and in herbal remedies; whether the report of that study will be published; and what pyrrolizidine alkaloids the study has so far found in milk samples.

Mr. Soames: The working party on naturally occurring toxicants in food has completed its study of pyrrolizidine alkaloids in milk. Pyrrolizidine alkaloids were not detected in any of the milk samples taken. A project to study the metabolism of pyrrolizidine alkaloids found in herbal ingredients has recently commenced and is due for completion in 1995. The results of all these studies will be published. Data on pyrrolizidine alkaloids in the herbal remedy comfrey have already been published.

PRIME MINISTER

Means-tested Payments

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all payments made to individuals by Government Departments, Government agencies and local authorities which are subject to a means test.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not available centrally. The main source of income-related payments is the social security system which provides benefits administered by the Benefits Agency and local authorities. These benefits include income support, family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

A number of Departments operate income-related assistance for a variety of special purposes. For example:

The Department of Education operates a system of mandatory and discretionary grants for people in higher education. Such awards consist of two parts, fees and maintenance, the latter of which is means tested. The scheme is administered by local authorities.

The Department of the Environment provides a scheme for home renovation which is administered by local authorities.

The Lord Chancellor's Department operates the scheme for legal aid.

The Department of Health is responsible for the NHS low income scheme which provides help with NHS charges, optical costs and fares to hospital to receive NHS treatment.

Alan Clark (Diaries)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration has been given to the confidentiality guidelines set out in the advice to Ministers manual in relation to the submission by the right hon. Alan Clark, former Minister of State for Defence Procurement, of his diaries to the Cabinet Office for review prior to publication.

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 19 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" requires former Ministers to submit their memoirs to the Secretary of the Cabinet before publication and to conform to the principles set out in the Radcliffe report of 1976 (Cmnd 6386). In offering comments, the Secretary of the Cabinet takes account of the recommendations in the Radcliffe report about the protection of confidential relationships within Government.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to monitor the incidence of kwashiakor, marasmus and malaria in Iraq; and by what mechanism Her Majesty's Government monitor the condition of the Iraqi people.

The Prime Minister: The United Nations conducted an assessment mission to Iraq in March 1993 which included a survey of the health of the population. As a result, WHO and UNICEF have included programmes to help relieve the situation in the United Nations plan of action. As well as official United Nations reports we also receive independent reports from non-governmental organisations working in Iraq.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General what was the average time to elapse between the offence and the completion of proceedings at magistrates courts for an indictable offence for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the average time taken for indictable cases from offence to completion has been collected centrally only since 1985. Data are published at regular intervals in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin series; issue Nos. 24/89 and 8/93 cover the years 1985 to 1992. Copies are available from the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

3. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the sentencing powers of the courts in respect of persistent 10 to 14-year-old offenders.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Courts currently do not have the power to sentence persistent juvenile offenders to custody. I propose to remedy this as soon as possible by introducing a secure training order for 12 to 15-year-olds.

19. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what view he has formed of the effectiveness of current measures to deal with persistent juvenile offenders.

21. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the current measures to deal with persistent juvenile offenders.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I do not consider that the measures currently available to the courts when they have to deal with persistent juvenile offenders are satisfactory. That is why I announced new proposals in my statement to the House on 2 March 1993, at columns 139 to 42.

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the numbers of juvenile offenders who come from single-parent families.

Mr. Jack: I regret that information currently available does not enable that particular assessment to be made.

26. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the operation of juvenile attendance centres.

Mr. Jack: The operation of attendance centres is kept under constant review. We are, however, currently preparing a new national standard which will cover objectives and regimes, revised attendance centre rules and fresh detailed administrative guidance for officers in charge of centres, all of which will be subject to an appropriate process of consultation before they are issued.

Home Office circular 72/1992 issued on 28 July 1992 described some of the new arrangements for dealing with young offenders following the full implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, and reminded courts of their powers to make attendance centre orders where young people have defaulted in the payment of fines. This circular listed all the centres available in England and Wales.

My Department also produces a periodical publication called "Attendance Centre News" which is circulated to, among others, the officers in charge of the centres, probation and social services and the courts. The most recent edition which was produced in a more accessible and informative style than previous versions was published in September last year. It included articles about the activities undertaken at the centres. A copy of it is available in the Library of the House.

Crime and the Economy

7. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made as to any link between crime and the economic situation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Work on this subject was covered in the Home Office research study "Trends in crime and their interpretation" published in 1990 and I have no current plans for fresh research into this area.

MSV Pescado

14. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made by Devon and Cornwall police in raising the MSV Pescado.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The salvage company contracted to raise the Pescado on behalf of the Devon and Cornwall constabulary hopes to raise the vessel in the very near future.

Libyan Life Prisoners

15. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners of Libyan nationality are now serving life sentences in United Kingdom prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Five prisoners of Libyan nationality are now serving life sentences in United Kingdom prisons.

Police Authority Chairpersons

16. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria will be used by him to select the chairpersons of the new police authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We want businesslike, efficiently run police authorities which are able to monitor police performance locally, to help establish local policing needs and to ensure the delivery of local and national policing objectives. This will require leadership from the police authority. I will select from the overall membership the person who is best able to give that lead.

Clear-up Rates

17. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which five police forces have the highest clear-up rates in England and Wales.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Dyfed-Powys cleared up 53 per cent. in 1992 followed by Gwent with 44 per cent., Merseyside with 42 per cent. and Suffolk and Lincolnshire with 39 per cent.

Sentencing

18. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the action taken by his Department to deal with lenient sentences.

25. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on legislation relating to appeals against lenient sentences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring).

Police Duties

20. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to increase the numbers of police officers on the streets.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have increased numbers by 16,500 since 1979. Increasing police strength is not, though, the only way to increase the number of front-line officers. We encourage police authorities to civilianise posts which do not need to be done by police officers, and to ensure that their officers are deployed as effectively as possible. This will allow more police officers to be released for operational duties, rather than having to undertake administrative tasks which can be done by others.

Criminal Justice Act 1991

22. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the workings of the Criminal Justice Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Arrangements were made in advance of the implementation of the Act on 1 October 1991 for its effects to be carefully monitored and evaluated. This process is still ongoing, but my right hon. and learned Friend has already said that it will be necessary to make some changes

to the sentencing provisions in part I of the Act and in the arrangements under which the courts operate the unit fine system.

Unit Fine System

23. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to review the workings of the unit fine system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We have been keeping the operation of the unit fine system under close review since it came into operation on 1 October 1992. We have also received representations about it, most recently from the Magistrates Association of England and Wales. Following its meeting with us on 4 May, the association has issued a bulletin to its members encouraging magistrates to make full use of the discretion already available to them under the system, in setting fine levels. But we have recognised that it will also be necessary to make some changes by way of legislation in areas such as the mechanism for determining unit values, in order to ensure that the scheme operates fairly and in accordance with the original intention. These changes will be introduced as soon as possible.

Street Lighting

27. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the effectiveness of improved street lighting to combat crime.

Mr. Jack: Research for the Home Office has shown that improved lighting can reduce crime when introduced as part of a package of crime prevention measures. By itself, better street lighting appears to have no direct effect on crime levels, but it is helpful in reducing the fear of crime and making people feel safer.

Car Crime

28. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to reduce car crime.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier to the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale).

Obscene Publications Acts

29. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made by the Metropolitan police in the latest year for which figures are available for offences arising out of the Obscene Publications Acts.

Mr. Jack: None. The Obscene Publications Act does not provide the police with a power of arrest.

Gun Licences

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review laws under which licences are issued for people to hold guns where objections are made to the authorities by next of kin of the applicant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Firearms Acts 1968 to 1992 require the chief officer of police to satisfy himself that an applicant for a firearm or shotgun certificate can be permitted to possess a firearm or shotgun without danger to public safety or to the peace. The chief officer may take account of any objections from the applicant's next of kin or anybody else when considering such an application. We have no plans to review this aspect of the law.

Bail (Court Appearances)

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and what percentage, of defendants bailed by *(a)* the police, *(b)* magistrates and *(c)* the Crown court failed to appear for the last 10 years.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is given in the table, and published annually in "Criminal statistics, England and Wales", chapter 8.

Persons bailed by the police, magistrates' courts or Crown court who failed to appear
1981-1991
England and Wales

Thousands and percentages

	Police		*Magistrates' courts*		*Crown Court*[1]	
	Number failing to appear	*Proportion of those bailed*	*Number failing to appear*	*Proportion of those bailed*	*Number failing to appear*	*Proportion of those bailed*
	Thousands	*Per cent.*	*Thousands*	*Per cent.*	*Thousands*	*Per cent.*
1981	22·5	4	13·2	5	3·0	4
1982	22·1	5	13·8	4	3·0	4
1983	25·1	4	12·7	4	2·3	3
1984	18·6	3	14·7	4	3·1	4
1985	17·1	3	15·0	4	3·9	5
1986	18·9	4	15·4	5	4·5	6
1987	25·5	5	18·7	5	5·4	7
1988	28·6	5	21·7	6	6·4	7
1989	32·8	5	22·5	6	6·6	8
1990	39·9	6	31·6	7	7·4	8
1991	42·6	7	32·8	7	8·4	9

[1] Includes those bailed by magistrates' on committal who failed to appear at the Crown Court.

Crime Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes were recorded by the police in England and Wales in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1992; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many *(a)* incidents of violence against a person and *(b)* robberies were recorded by the police in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1992; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many incidents of fraud and forgery were recorded by the police in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The requested information is published in table 2.17 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1989" and in table 6 of Home Office statistical bulletin 9/93; copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the percentage clear-up rate for crime, *(b)* the authorised police establishment and *(c)* the total number of crimes reported for each police force in England and Wales for 1992.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Information on percentage clear-up rates and the number of recorded offences by police force area for 1992 is contained in tables 4 and 2 respectively of Home Office statistical bulletin 9/93, a copy of which is available in the Library. Figures for the authorised police establishment for 31 December 1992 are contained in the table:

Authorised police establishment as at 31 December 1992 England and Wales 1992

Police force area	*Authorised establishment*
Avon and Somerset	3,087
Bedfordshire	1,178
Cambridgeshire	1,241
Cheshire	1,920
Cleveland	1,302
Cumbria	1,187
Derbyshire	1,850
Devon and Cornwall	2,928
Dorset	1,302
Durham	1,389
Essex	2,950
Gloucestershire	1,184
Greater Manchester	7,077
Hampshire	3,269
Hertfordshire	1,684
Humberside	2,034
Kent	3,096
Lancashire	3,229
Leicestershire	1,853
Lincolnshire	1,206
London, City of	798
Merseyside	4,706
Metropolitan Police District	28,240
Norfolk	1,446
Northamptonshire	1,190
Northumbria	3,613
North Yorkshire	1,418
Nottinghamshire	2,344
South Yorkshire	3,031
Staffordshire	2,215
Suffolk	1,233
Surrey	1,673
Sussex	3,014
Thames Valley	3,812
Warwickshire	1,020
West Mercia	2,053
West Midlands	6,977
West Yorkshire	5,295
Wiltshire	1,181
Dyfed-Powys	969
Gwent	1,010
North Wales	1,369
South Wales	3,168
England and Wales	126,941

Police Roles

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will undertake a detailed study of the present and future roles of the police.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is currently awaiting the report from Sir Patrick Sheehy, chairman of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards. In reaching its recommendations, the inquiry has been considering and taking into account, the results of fact-finding studies into the roles and responsibilities of police officers.

Poppers

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the proscribing of the recreational drug poppers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The active ingredient of "poppers" is one or other of a group of chemicals known as alkyl nitrites. The misuse of alkyl nitrites has been considered by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on three occasions, most recently in 1991. The council found that, although these substances posed a limited health hazard when misused, they were not dependence forming and did not give rise to the sorts of social problems which were sufficient to justify their control under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

We continue to keep the situation under review.

Bone Tests

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of his Department's tests at Aldermaston to identify bones brought from Russia.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have asked the chief executive of the Forensic Science Service to reply and she will do so shortly. A copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Dr. Janet Thompson to Mr. David Atkinson, undated:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about the joint Russian British project to identify remains purported to be those of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. As you know, the arrangement now is that the Chief Executive of an Executive Agency, with the agreement of the Minister, replies to Members of Parliament on operational matters. I am therefore replying on behalf of the Home Office Forensic Science Service (FSS).

Samples of the remains discovered near Ekaterinburg in July 1991 were brought to Britain in September by Dr. Pavel Ivanov of the Bureau of the Chief Forensic Medical

Examiner, Russian Ministry of Health. Work carried out in Russia had lead to a tentative identification but Russian forensic authorities sought the assistance of the FSS in applying the Polymerase Chain Reaction DNA technique to the samples.

Extraction of DNA from the samples was successful. Comparison with DNA from known relatives of the Romanov family, and statistical analysis of the findings, is at present being undertaken at the FSS's Research Laboratory in Aldermaston. We expect to announce the results of the project in the summer.

The work also forms part of the FSS research programme. If validated, the techniques used will be applied to criminal casework and will extend the range of services we provide.

Interior Ministers Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals in regard to deterring, discovering and apprehending nuclear smugglers will be discussed at the European Interior Ministers Council in Denmark on 6 and 7 May.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Horse Watch Schemes

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to support horse watch schemes in all parts of the country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We encourage all watch type schemes which involve members of the community helping the police in the fight against crime.

I understand that police forces throughout the country provide assistance to people wishing to set up horse watch schemes. For example, there are schemes in operation in areas such as Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Suffolk and Northumbria.

In March this year, the Association of Chief Police Officers gave approval to national guidelines which have been drawn up by the British Horse Society. The guidelines provide information on how to set up and run horse watch schemes and have recently been sent to all police forces in England and Wales. It is, however, ultimately for each chief officer of police to decide how to allocate the resources available to him.

Police (Courts)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the time spent by police officers attending court which turn out to be unnecessary because they are not called as witnesses.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The implementation of the recommendations of the working group on pre-trial issues which are aimed at increasing the efficiency of the whole pre-trial process will affect this. The recommendations include improved court listing procedures and greater emphasis on pre-trial hearings. The package of measures should significantly reduce the number of occasions on which police officers attend court for no useful purpose.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Flag

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the origin and current status of the Northern Ireland flag.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In 1953 the former Government of Northern Ireland gave their assent to the flying in certain circumstances of their own flag known as the "Ulster Banner". This consists of a St. George's cross with a crowned six-pointed star and a red hand at the centre. This was not intended to be a replacement or alternative to the Union flag as the official flag of Northern Ireland. Since the dissolution of the Government of Northern Ireland, this flag has had no official status.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what flag or flags are used by Her Majesty's Government to represent Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The official flag of Northern Ireland is the Union flag.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the occasions in the last year on which the Minister responsible for health and agriculture visited the constituency of Upper Bann, indicating with respect to each visit whether the hon. Member for that constituency was notified.

Mr. Hanley: In his capacity as health Minister, my noble Friend Lord Arran visited Craigavon area hospital on 11 May 1992 and 20 April 1993, and Banvale social education centre on 17 February 1993. In his capacity as Minister for agriculture, he visited the constituency of Upper Bann on 12 May 1992, 23 July 1992, 27 August 1992 and 24 February 1993. The hon. Member was notified on each occasion except 27 August 1992.

Security Statistics

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available the security statistics for 1991, together with details of persons charged with terrorist-type offences and convictions for scheduled offences for the year.

Mr. Mates: Security statistics for 1991 are as follows. Statistics for previous years can be obtained from the Library.

Table 1
Statistics of terrorist activity

	Number
(a) Shooting incidents[1]	409
(b) Explosions	230
Estimated weight in kilograms	6,578
(c) Bombs neutralised	137
Estimated weight in kilograms	2,700
(d) Armed robberies	536
(e) Amount stolen	£1,672,884
(f) Malicious fires	333
(g) Deaths:	
Civilian	75
Regular Army	5
Royal Irish Regiment	8
Royal Ulster Constabulary	5
Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	1
TOTAL	94

	Number
(f) Injuries:	
Civilian	570
Regular Army	197
Royal Irish Regiment	56
Royal Ulster Constabulary	108
Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	31
TOTAL	962

[1] Excludes shots heard.

Table 2
Statistics of security forces activity

	Number
(a) (i) Dwellings searched by the Army:	
Occupied	746
Unoccupied	176
Derelict	164
TOTAL	1,086
(a) (ii) Dwellings searched by the RUC:	
Occupied Unoccupied Derelict	[1] —
TOTAL	2,961
(b) Finds:	
Weapons	214
Ammunition (rounds of)	18,175
Explosives (weight in Kg)	4,168
(c) Persons charged with terrorist-type offences:	
Murder	37
Attempted murder	83
Firearms offences	87
Explosives offences	24
Armed robbery	40
Others	120
TOTAL	391

[1] Breakdown into occupied, unoccupied or derelict not provided by the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Note: Searches of dwellings frequently involve both the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary and are registered in their respective records. The totals should therefore not be aggregated and are shown separately to avoid an element of double counting.

Table 3
Convictions and sentences for scheduled offences tried on indictment at Belfast Crown Court 1991

Offences	Persons convicted	Non-custodial sentence	Young offenders centre/ training school	Custodial sentences (January to December 1991) Less than 3 years	3 years and less than 7 years	7 years and less than 10 years	10 years and less than 15 years	15 years and less than 20 years	20 years and over	Detained S.O.S.	Life
Murder	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
Aiding and abetting murder	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Attempted murder	16	1	0	0	0	1	4	5	5	0	0
Conspiracy to murder	14	1	1	0	1	0	5	2	4	0	0
Manslaughter	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	5	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wounding or grievous bodily harm with intent	20	3	3	3	3	4	4	0	0	0	0
Wounding or grievous bodily harm	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kidnapping and false imprisonment	20	3	0	4	4	5	4	0	0	0	0
Arson	7	1	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Petrol bomb offences	7	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hijacking	8	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	88	20	26	24	8	8	2	0	0	0	0
Burglary (aggravated)	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blackmail	7	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Receiving	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Membership	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unlawful collection of information	10	1	1	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wearing hoods	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Withholding information	7	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Recording information	4	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Possession of information useful to terrorists	11	2	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Making property available	13	8	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Riot	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrying firearm with intent	10	4	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Possession of firearm in suspicious circumstances	11	5	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Possession of firearm with intent	48	15	5	2	6	12	8	0	0	0	0
Explosives offences	34	2	1	2	3	6	5	10	5	0	0
Intimidation	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Threats to kill	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Criminal damage	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Handling	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pervert course of justice (attempt)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Theft	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Offences	Persons convicted	Non-custodial sentence	Young offenders centre training school	Custodial sentences (January to December 1991): Less than 5 years	5 years and less than 7 years	7 years and less than 10 years	10 years and less than 15 years	15 years and less than 20 years	20 years and over	Detained S.O.S.	Life
Taking motor vehicle without consent	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Breach of community service order	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Breach of suspended sentence	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Making or receiving contributions	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	388	115	48	77	34	38	34	17	14	1	10

Notes:

1. Non-scheduled offences are included in table 3 where co-defendants were charged with scheduled offences, and where the charge was "reduced" (e.g. from robbery to handling stolen goods), or where a defendant pleaded guilty to a lesser charge.
2. Breach of community service orders/suspended sentences are included where the orders were made on scheduled offences. They are also included where the breach of conditions is heard along with other scheduled offences.
3. Where a person has been convicted of more than one offence, only that offence which received the longest sentence is recorded in the statistics.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current extent of United Kingdom aid to Indonesia; and what has it been over the past five years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 7 May, column *260*.

We also provide debt relief on past development loans. The Commonwealth Development Corporation currently has investments totalling £72 million and covering 11 projects.

Gross public expenditure on United Kingdom aid to Indonesia since 1987-88 is as follows:

(in £ millions)

	Technical Co-op and Financial Aid	ATP	CDC	Debt Relief	Total
1987-88	6·044	1·807	4·537	2·273	14·660
1988-89	8·333	2·410	4·350	2·273	17·366
1989-90	7·445	2·192	9·707	2·273	21·616
1990-91	10·689	6·342	5·296	2·273	24·600
1991-92	10·372	10·828	10·952	2·273	34·425

Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Brazil

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the Overseas Development Administration aid programme for Brazil; and what plans he has to augment the programme that assists Brazil's Indian population.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The main emphasis of the Brazil programme is on environmental activities. There is a large programme of forestry support in the Amazonia region and a smaller programme of urban environmental projects. We are also involved in a number of other sectors, mainly involving human resource development. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 19 April 1993, columns *37-38*.

We are currently assisting indigenous people with support to six projects run by the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and OXFAM co-financed through the joint funding scheme. We have also agreed to assist the Ministry of Indian Affairs in refitting three aircraft which are used to protect and provide services for the indigenous peoples of Brazil.

Cambodia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds were pledged by the United Kingdom for Cambodia at the United Nations Aid Conference in Tokyo in June 1992; how this commitment has been met to date; what information he has on the payments made to date by the other pledger nations; and if he will make a statement on the current effectiveness of the United Nations transitional authority in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In June 1992 we announced that our total aid pledge for Cambodia had been increased by $10 million to some $30 million. Of this sum we have already committed nearly $24 million, principally on humanitarian aid and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees repatriation programme, mine clearance, human rights, health care, water supply and English language teacher training. Of the $880 million pledged by donors at Tokyo, some $94·3 million had been provided for aid projects within Cambodia up to February this year. A national breakdown of this figure is not available.

UNTAC has made considerable progress towards implementing the comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia. Preparations for the elections due to be held from 23 to 27 May are well advanced: more than

4·6 million Cambodians have registered to vote, 96 per cent. of those eligible; the election campaign began on 6 April, and UNTAC has taken a range of measures to promote a neutral political environment. In addition, nearly all the 350,000 refugees formerly in camps on the Thai-Cambodian border have returned to their homes.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will call on the G7 countries at their summit in July to support a financial plan for sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 12 May 1993]:* We are working to ensure that the developing countries, including those in Africa, will be among the subjects covered at the G7 summit, especially as the summit will take place in the run-up to the conference on Africa to be hosted by the Japanese Government in October. The needs of sub-Saharan Africa have a high priority for the British aid programme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library before the United Nations conference on human rights in Vienna a copy of the United Kingdom national statement on human rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A copy of the United Kingdom national statement at the United Nations world conference on human rights will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as it has been delivered.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent Her Majesty's Government at the United Nations conference on human rights in Vienna in June.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will be represented at the United Nations conference on human rights in Vienna from 14 to 25 June, by a delegation consisting of Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials with expertise in the field of human rights, including the United Kingdom permanent representative to the United Nations at Geneva, and representatives of interested dependent territories. The delegation will be led either by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs or by myself.

Eritrea

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by his Department to grant diplomatic recognition to Eritrea following the recent referendum.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We warmly welcome the outcome of the referendum on Eritrea's status. United Nations observers have confirmed their satisfaction with the process. This opens the way for recognition of Eritrea. The Eritreans have announced that their independence will be formally declared on 24 May. Accordingly, we plan to announce our decision on recognition by that date.

Public Immunity Certificates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr Michie) of 25 November 1992, *Official Report*, column 861, what country he was in when the public immunity certificate to which he refers was *(a)* being considered and *(b)* signed.

Mr. Hurd: I was in South Africa when the public interest immunity was considered and signed on 3 and 4 September 1992. When the supplemental certificate was considered and signed, I had returned to London from the United Nations General Assembly in the early hours of 23 September for two debates in the House returning to New York in the afternoon of 25 September.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals were put forward by the United Kingdom in regard to the European Commission report on access to information; and what discussions took place and what decisions were taken on the report at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 to 11 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: None. The Council agreed that the Commission's paper was a good basis for further work and that it should be studied further in the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals were put forward by the United Kingdom on trade and environment at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 to 11 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Kingdom did not put forward any specific proposals on trade and the environment at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May. Ministers agreed a statement put forward by the presidency on the relationship between trade and environmental policies in advance of the OECD ministerial meeting on 2 June.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many entry clearances were issued to overseas domestic workers at the latest available date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Separate statistics on the number of entry clearances issued to domestic workers are not kept and could not be obtained except at disproportionate expense.

Iran

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart regarding the sponsorship of terrorism by Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have regular discussions with the United States on combating the whole range of international terrorism, including state sponsorship.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 April, *Official Report*, column *578*, what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to combat international terrorism sponsored by Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We shall continue our efforts, both through bilateral co-operation and international forums, to combat all forms of state support for international terrorism. We and our European partners made clear our concern about Iran's behaviour in this area at the Edinburgh summit in December 1992.

Belize

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to guarantee the frontier of Belize with Guatemala; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Our policy is to contribute all we can to the continuing improvement in relations between Belize and Guatemala and to encourage a full and final settlement of the border dispute between the two countries.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest situation regarding the Belize garrison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The British garrison has been deployed in Belize since 1948. The central American region, of which Belize forms a part, has recently seen a welcome transformation in its political and security circumstances. The civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador are over; peace talks are in progress in Guatemala's 30-year domestic conflict; and progress towards regional integration is gathering speed. Central America's major neighbours, the Group of 3—Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela—are playing a part in this process, as is the United States. So is Britain, with its EC partners, through the San José dialogue between the EC and central America.

In 1991 Guatemala recognised Belize as a sovereign and independent state; diplomatic relations were subsequently established and much progress has been made since then towards a normal bilateral relationship. The time has now come for the British military presence in Belize to evolve, to reflect the improvements in the regional political and security picture and in the very welcome and encouraging developments in Belize/Guatemala relations. Accordingly, over the next year or so, the garrison will be gradually reduced. At the request of and with the agreement of the Government of Belize, the British military presence will take the form of a training operation for United Kingdom troops. The formal responsibility for the defence of Belize will pass from British forces to the Belize defence force at a date to be announced in due course. Britain stands ready to play a part in any consultations that the Belize authorities may request on Belize's future security.

The British troop presence in Belize is of long standing. Her Majesty's Government welcome the developments in Belize's bilateral and regional relationships which permit this evolution of the British troop presence. Her Majesty's Government have assisted since Belizean independence in 1981 with the development of the Belize defence force—BDF—through the provision of loan service personnel, equipment, training and advice. We will maintain our programme of assistance to the BDF to sustain and improve the force's capability. Belize will, of course, also continue to be a beneficiary under Britain's bilateral aid programme.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the health situation in relation to marasmus, kwashiokor, and malaria in Iraq; and what response he has made to the latest Harvard study of the medical situation in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 12 May 1993]:* We are aware of reports that the general standard of health in Iraq continues to decline as a result of the failure of the Government of Iraq to use their existing resources for the benefit of those in need in Iraq. I have not seen a copy of any recent Harvard study.

HEALTH

Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of NHS abortions is provided through agency arrangements, *(a)* nationally and *(b)* for each district health authority;

(2) which district health authorities have agency arrangements for the provision of NHS abortions.

Mr. Sackville: The information will be placed in the Library. For reasons of confidentiality, statistics for district health authorities are presented by DHA of woman's usual residence, not by DHA of termination.

Agency arrangements for provision of national health service abortions are agreed between individual DHAs and the private sector. They are set up to provide for the needs of the DHA's resident population. Central receipt of the notification of dates when agency arrangements come into effect, and when they are dissolved, can be subject to delay and therefore the figures should be interpreted with caution.

AZT

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a list of all the fully completed research on the effects of AZT on patients with either ARC or AIDS distinguishing the research that shows conclusively that AZT is of benefit in such cases.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Licensing Authority receives reports of fully completed research as part of a licensing application. The information relating to licensing applications is confidential in accordance with section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968. However, most of the extensive research has been published in the scientific literature and copies will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds the drug AZT was given fast-track licensing by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The licence application for Retrovir (AZT) was given fast-track status by the Licensing

Authority on the grounds that it was considered to be a potential major advance in the treatment of AIDS patients. At the time of the decision in late 1986 there was no alternative licensed product for the treatment of AIDS. The decision to fast-track the application was made solely on public health grounds.

The fast-tracking of an application means that it is assessed out of turn, but is still subject to the full standard assessment process. The criteria for granting fast-track status to an application was set out in the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), the then Secretary of State, to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) on 3 November 1987 at column *703*.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration is being given to the advertising and promotion campaign relating to AZT in respect of the application of the prescription medicines code of practice authority guidelines.

Dr. Mawhinney: The application of the code of practice is a matter for the prescription medicines code of practice authority.

Wellcome Foundation

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the meetings which took place from 1985 to 1988 between representatives of the Wellcome Foundation and her Department or with Ministers.

Dr. Mawhinney: There were 16 meetings with officials, and one with a Minister and officials on pharmaceutical price regulation scheme matters and related business. There was also a number of meetings with officials of the then medicines division, now the Medicines Control Agency, and the AIDS unit, covering a large number of issues, but it is possible to quantify these only at disproportionate cost.

Limited List Prescribing

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *159-60*, how many of the *(a)* anti-diarrhoeal drugs, *(b)* appetite suppressants, *(c)* medicines for the treatment of vaginal and vulval conditions and *(d)* drugs for the treatment of soft tissue inflammation currently available on the national health service have been the subject of letters to manufacturers by the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs in respect of the proposed extension of the limited list.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Advisory Committee on Drugs is an independent committee. It would not be appropriate at this stage to disclose information about the number of products which are the subject of discussions with manufacturers in relation to the proposed extension of the selected list scheme.

Salmonella

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effect of the implementation of the Food Safety Act 1990 on the incidence of salmonella; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The reported levels of salmonella are affected by a number of factors. These may include increased reporting of foodborne illness, changes in eating patterns and in food handling and hygiene practices. It is therefore extremely difficult to quantify the effect of the implementation of the Food Safety Act as against these other factors.

Welfare Food Outlets

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the likely effect of placing restrictions on the outlets for welfare food and child vitamin supplements on the take-up of these products.

Mr. Sackville: None. The outlets which may supply these products remain those listed in the Welfare Food Amendment Regulations 1988.

Environmental Health Prosecutions

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *217*, what plans she has to revise the collection of statistics to make it possible to evaluate the percentage of successful prosecutions brought by environmental health officers.

Mr. Sackville: The statistics enable a comparison to be made between the number of establishments prosecuted under the Food Safety Act 1990 and subordinate legislation and the number of successful convictions. However, it is not possible to determine those taken by environmental health officers. We have no plans to change the form of the statistics which are based on EC requirements.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's estimate of *(a)* the number of persons who contracted hepatitis C following blood transfusions in the period January 1989 to September 1991, *(b)* how many of these persons have pursued legal action against the Blood Transfusion Service or any other body in respect of the contraction of post-transfusion hepatitis C and *(c)* what is the average length of time taken for the settlement of these claims.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available for the Department to make such an estimate. No legal action has been brought against the Department by any person alleging to have contracted hepatitis C through blood transfusion during the specified period.

Information is not available centrally about any actions brought against health authorities.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has on a link between the problem of extreme long sight in children and the administration of the MMR vaccine; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is not aware of any evidence for such a link.

Mr. Mohammed Saeed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 4 May, *Official Report*, column 65, what safeguards have been introduced, following her departmental inquiry into matters relating to Mohammed Saeed, to prevent unqualified persons from becoming general practitioners; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Mr. Saeed was granted full registration by the General Medical Council in 1961 on the basis of reciprocal agreements with overseas medical schools in place at that time. These agreements are now more restricted in scope and the council's registration procedures have been considerably tightened up. The Department recently issued guidance (EL(92)84) to national health service-employing authorities and family health services authorities reminding them of the need to be sure that procedures for employing doctors involve checks which confirm that they are registered with the General Medical Council and that their registration certificates cover the tasks they are expected to undertake. A copy of the guidance is available in the Library.

Children (Illnesses)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children of each sex aged under 18 years were recorded as having *(a)* diabetes, *(b)* asthma, *(c)* hayfever, *(d)* eczema and *(e)* allergic rhinitis in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Food Safety

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the extent to which environmental health officers distinguish clearly between good practice and legal requirements in accordance with the codes issued under section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Sackville: The small number of cases which come to the attention of the Department does not enable us to make an assessment of the extent to which environmental health officers distinguish clearly between good practice and legal requirements. Department of Health officials take every opportunity to emphasise the importance of this distinction—through training courses for EHOs, conferences, seminars, and work with the Institution of Environmental Health Officers and the local authorities co-ordinating body on food and trading standards. In addition, the Department wrote, on 6 May, to all chief EHOs in England reminding them of the need to make this distinction. A copy of this letter will be placed in the Library.

Medical Specialists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the number of new specialists needed to implement fully the report of the working group on specialist medical training and of the real-term cost implications of these new specialists.

Dr. Mawhinney: The report has been issued for consultation so that any decisions on implementation can be taken in the light of comments from all interested parties. Work on the resource implications will be taken forward as part of the consultative process with the objective of implementing any changes without increasing national health service pay bills beyond existing plans.

Maternity Claims

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many maternity claim forms were submitted by general practitioners in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio of operations done by consultants to doctors in the training grades in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Rubella

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were born with congenital rubella syndrome in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The number of cases of confirmed or suspected congenital rubella reported to the national congenital rubella surveillance programme is shown in the table:

Year of birth	*Registered by January 1993*
1979	not available
1980	36
1981	16
1982	38
1983	68
1984	52
1985	24
1986	29
1987	40
1988	22
1989	13
1990	11
1991	2
1992	[1]6

[1] Includes a set of triplets.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the number of district health authorities which do not provide a comprehensive immunisation service for rubella in schools for girls aged 10 to 14 years.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those health authorities which have stopped their programmes of rubella injections at school premises, together with the year in which the programme ceased.

Mr. Sackville: The Government policy is that all girls between their 10th and 14th birthdays should be immunised with single antigen rubella vaccine unless there is documented evidence that they have received measles,

mumps and rubella vaccine already. It is for individual health authorities to decide how best to implement this policy; most currently do so through a schools immunisation programme.

The Department of Health does not routinely collect information about local arrangements. However, the Public Health Laboratory Service is to undertake a survey shortly which will establish what arrangements are in place.

Community Care

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her best estimate for the time taken to assess the needs of a patient under the new community care programme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Assessment procedures need to be matched to individual circumstances and will, therefore, vary considerably in length and complexity. We have made it clear to local authorities that assessment processes should be as simple, quick and efficient as possible so that people get the care they need when they need it.

Child Protection Register

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of children of each sex on the child protection register in each year since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The information available is shown in the table. Information was not collected centrally before 1988.

Number of children on child protection registers in England at 31 March

Year	Boys	Girls
[1]1988	18,700	20,500
1989	19,700	21,400
1990	21,100	22,500
1991	22,200	23,100
[2]1992	18,800	19,800

[1] Results of a pilot survey.
[2] Provisional.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.

Diphtheria

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of diphtheria have been reported in each of the last 20 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Notified cases of Diphtheria England and Wales 1972-91

	Number
1972	4
1973	2
1974	3
1975	11
1976	2
1977	2
1978	0
1979	0
1980	5
1981	2
1982	4
1983	4
1984	4
1985	4
1986	4
1987	2
1988	1
1989	2
1990	2
1991	2

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the use of ministerial cars for travel from home to the normal place of employment is regarded for tax purposes by the Department as private use that is merely incidental to the business use of the ministerial car.

Mr. Sackville: Yes.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the work force employed by the national health service within each English health region is registered disabled.

Dr. Mawhinney: Tables showing the number and percentage of registered disabled persons employed by a wide range of public sector employers, including regional health authorities, district health authorities and national health service trusts, are published annually in the *Employment Gazette*. The figures are published with the agreement of the employers concerned.

The latest figures relating to June 1992 are in the April 1993 edition of the *Gazette*, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of registered disabled people working within her Department and the national health service management executive; what percentage of the total work force of these two bodies this number represents; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: At 11 May 1993, 73 registered disabled people were employed by the Department; this represents 1.4 per cent. of the work force. This includes nine registered disabled people employed in the national health service management executive, representing 1 per cent. of its work force.

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the practice of the chief executive of the national health service management executive on response times to correspondence from hon. Members; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The chief executive of the national health service management executive treats all correspondence from hon. Members as a matter of priority and aims to provide a reply as quickly as possible. All letters are acknowledged immediately and a full reply is provided as soon as necessary inquiries are completed.

Diamorphine

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued by her Department to general practitioners and hospitals with regard to the use of the drug diamorphine.

Dr. Mawhinney: Diamorphine is a controlled drug under schedule 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985. Its supply and prescription are therefore subject to certain controls, which are described in the British National Formulary, which is distributed twice a year free of charge to all prescribers by the Department of Health. A copy of the British National Formulary is available in the Library.

Prescribing information on the use of diamorphine is given to general practitioners and hospitals in the British National Formulary and in data sheets for products, issued by the manufacturers and authorised by the Licensing Authority. Guidance is also contained in the "Guide to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971" and the Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

Quarry House

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the cost of building Quarry house in Leeds and *(b)* the cost of landscaping around Quarry house.

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

The total costs of building Quarry house are £55·5 million. This includes the costs of landscaping those areas which are not the responsibility of Leeds city council.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Waste Storage

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions the Atomic Weapons Establishment or other Ministry of Defence personnel have held with Atomic Energy Authority Technology in the last 10 years regarding the possibility of utilising its low-level waste storage sites at either Harwell or Dounreay.

Mr. Aitken: The Atomic Weapons Establishment has not had any discussions with AEA(T) in the last 10 years regarding the possibility of utilising its low-level waste storage sites at either Harwell or Dounreay. However, other branches of my Department currently make use of the storage and disposal facilities available at Harwell and Dounreay.

Aldermaston

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the exact role and function of *(a)* radiological protection advisory group staff and *(b)* operational health physicist staff, employed at AWE Aldermaston as referred to in the oral evidence to the Select Committee on Defence at HC 479 of Session 1989-90 Q.10ff, p.2; and if he will list (i) the numbers of these staff employed at AWE Aldermaston in each year since 1970 and (ii) the shortfall in the numbers of these staff in each of those years.

Mr. Aitken: The role and function of AWE radiological protection advisory group staff is to provide advice and support in the areas of radiation dosimetry, radiological requirements for new and operating facilities, monitoring of the environment for radioactive materials, nuclear safety hazards assessments, and responses to radiological incidents.

The role and function of the AWE operational health physics staff is to provide advice on operational health physics aspects of the work undertaken at AWE and also to provide a comprehensive radiological monitoring service for all work undertaken at AWE. Details of the numbers of staff employed during the period 1970-1992 are not held in the form requested, and to provide them would require disproportionate time and cost. However, since the report by Sir Edward Pochin in 1978, the total number of radiological protection staff and health physicist staff has increased by a factor of three.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), of 2 March, *Official Report*, column *111*, if he will list the detailed actions identified by Sir Edward Pochin following his review of radiological health and safety at Aldermaston.

Mr. Aitken: The detailed actions to which I referred in my answer of 2 March were compiled by AWE—then AWRE—management as a result of the scrutiny of Sir Edward Pochin's report, rather than by Sir Edward Pochin himself. This was an internal management report which, in accordance with our usual practice, has not been released for publication.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 6 November, *Official Report*, column 530, whether the project definition study into the scope of work needed to overcome the corrosion problems of the A91 complex at Aldermaston is now complete; what is the estimated date he now expects A91 to be fully operational; and if he will place a copy of the A91 project definition study in the Library.

Mr. Aitken: The project definition study into the A91 corrosion problems has been completed. The study has identified a range of options and these are currently being evaluated. Until these options have been fully studied, it is not possible to give a forecast date for the facility to become fully operational. The project definition study report contains commercially sensitive information and it would not be appropriate for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on each of the *(a)* major injuries, *(b)* other injuries, *(c)* dangerous occurrences and *(d)* cases of disease, as defined in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985—SI, 1985, No. 2023—reported to the Health and Safety Executive by AWE Aldermaston during *(a)* 1976, *(b)* 1981, *(c)* 1984 and *(d)* 1987.

Mr. Aitken: A total of 138 incidents for illness/injury and dangerous occurrences were reported to the Health and Safety Executive, as defined in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985, SI, 1985, No. 2023, by AWE Aldermaston in the years 1976, 1981, 1984 and 1987. Further details of these incidents are as follows: 1976—*(a)* major injuries (total three)—two fractured fibula; one fractured scafoid *(b)* other injuries (total 32)—10 falls;

four back injuries; seven hand injuries; three stepping on or striking objects; two falls of objects; one facial acid burn; one burns to hands; one dislocated knee; one eye injury; one hernia; one sports injury *(c)* dangerous occurrences (total one)—one contamination incident and *(d)* cases of disease (total nil). 1981—*(a)* major injuries (total four)—one fractured humerus; one fractured radius; two fractured bones *(b)* other injuries (total 32)—12 falls; eight back pain; five stepping on or striking objects; three road traffic accident; two sports; one fall of object; one handling *(c)* dangerous occurrences (total nil) and *(d)* cases of disease (total nil). 1984—*(a)* major injuries (total one)—one fractured shoulder *(b)* other injuries (total 22)—10 falls; three road traffic accidents; three back pain; one sports; one fatigue; one splinter in finger; two falls of objects; one cut from handtool (c) dangerous occurrences (total one)—one contamination incident and *(d)* cases of disease (total nil). 1987 *(a)*—major injuries (total three)—two fractured wrists; one fractured ribs *(b)* other injuries (total 38)—14 falls; nine back injuries; four handling; four sports; one fall of objects; two stepping on or striking objects; one eye injury; one handtool injury; one road traffic accident; one damaged ribs *(c)* dangerous occurrences (total one)—leakage from effluent pipeline and *(d)* cases of disease (total nil).

Waste Management

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department in tackling the issues listed in paragraph 6.9, page 79 of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Council 12th annual report of 1991.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has a number of research programmes in hand to address the issues to which the hon. Member refers.

Contracts

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of defence contracts to his Department are provided from *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* abroad, respectively; and if he will publish an annual figure in each case.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to tables 1.11 and 1.13 of "Defence Statistics", 1992 edition, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Explosives

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigation will be made regarding the explosive device found in the sea off Coll; if the results of the inquiry will be published; what steps have been taken to inform and protect west coast fishermen, Caledonian MacBrayne and merchant shipping operating in the area of the risks from explosive devices; if he will give details of the type of ordnance recovered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Investigation has established that the item in question was an inert training device. Though the device contained a quantity of detonating cord, this posed no appreciable risk to fishermen or to shipping. These devices are usually recovered after each exercise.

Navy Commanders (Re-employment)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any former Royal Navy commander now employed by Rolls-Royce and Associates has been hired back by the MOD, Navy Department, to carry out the same duties that he previously discharged as an officer in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No, but a Rolls-Royce and Associates employee, a former Royal Navy commander previously involved in the management of the Trident works facilities at the Clyde submarine base, Faslane, has been engaged to provide some essential short-term assistance to the Department's shiplift project team.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the number of British troops currently serving under the United Nations flag in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 20 April, *Official Report*, column 165.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military patients were treated in each of the last three years for which figures are available at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is contained in the table.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
In Patients			
Military	4,785	4,848	4,882
Civilian	8,288	7,657	5,909
Out Patients			
Military	10,596	12,071	7,987
Civilian	15,258	13,312	12,931

Munitions Shipments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *191*, if he will publish as much information in regard to the shipping of munitions in the eastern Mediterranean on his Department's behalf as can be given without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is not held centrally within the Department and no information can be provided without disproportionate cost.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of his Department in respect of the proposed design and height of the Skye bridge, with

particular reference to any emergency defence planning provisions which may arise involving the passage under the bridge of the largest naval vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has been fully consulted over the specifications for the Skye bridge and is content that the design and height of the bridge is consistent with defence requirements for passage of the Kyle of Lochalsh.

Personnel (Eastern Europe)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *191*, if he will estimate the total number of serving personnel together with members of their families in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* Poland, *(c)* Lithuania, *(d)* Latvia, *(e)* Estonia, *(f)* Georgia and *(g)* Moldavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In addition to the numbers of Russian military personnel stationed in Germany, Poland, the Baltic Republic and Georgia I gave in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) on 22 April, *Official Report*, column *191*, there are some 9,000 personnel stationed in Moldavia. The number of family members will be in proportion to the size of the forces, but it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate.

Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column *149*, whether the United Nations will be reimbursing the costs of transporting the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment's Warrior armoured vehicles to Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Nations assumed financial responsibility for UNPROFOR operations in Bosnia with effect from 1 April 1993. The handling of individual cost elements will be a matter for negotiation.

HMS Avenger

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the proposed visit of HMS Avenger to Chile was cancelled; what would have been the additional fuel cost involved; what was the purpose of the proposed visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It had originally been planned that HMS Avenger would return from patrol in the south Atlantic via the Pacific ocean and Panama canal, and that she would take the opportunity to pay an informal, goodwill visit to Chile later this month. In the light of constraints on fuel usage and of higher priority claims on the fleet's resources, including commitments in the Adriatic, however, it was decided Avenger should return directly to the United Kingdom via the Atlantic saving fuel costs of around £140,000.

The cancellation of the visit to Chile has not affected the close relations which exist between the Royal Navy and the Chilean Navy. Royal Navy ships have visited Chile regularly in the past and will continue to do so.

European Fighter Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current total estimated cost of *(a)* the development and *(b)* the production of the European fighter aircraft; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish the latest estimates of the costs associated with the European fighter aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The current estimated cost of EF2000 development to the United Kingdom is some £3·4 billion. Production is likely to cost £8·3 billion at current prices. The estimated total project cost, comprising the costs of development, production and integrated logistic support, is some £13·1 billion. After allowances made for inflation, the real increase in project costs since the start of development is less than 10 per cent., which is unwelcome but not unexpected for a collaborative project of this magnitude and technical complexity.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated maintenance costs for one European fighter aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: It is not possbile to be certain about the operating cost, including maintenance and repair, until a substantial number of development flying hours have been accumulated. However, the contractual specification for the aircraft calls for a significantly better level of reliability than for current RAF in-service aircraft.

Belize

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of military helicopters in Belize in relation to the incident in early April involving Guatemalan intruders stealing mahogany trees from Belize territory.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It appears that this relatively minor incident involved trees illegally felled in Guatemala. The commander British forces Belize authorised the use of military helicopters to transport service personnel and to visit the area in question accompanied by representatives of Belizean agencies involved. Belize defence force deployments were by means of their own transport aircraft. I understand that the Belizean and Guatemalan Governments have resolved the incident to their mutual satisfaction.

Western European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual expenditure of the WEU, and the United Kingdom's total budget contributions to this expenditure; what forecasts have been made of future expenditure and of the United Kingdom contribution towards it; and how much is attributable to the costs connected with its move to Brussels, including the provision of buildings and other facilities there.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have been asked to reply.

At current rates of exchange, the WEU budget for 1993 is £24·1 million. The United Kingdom share of this is £4·1 million. Forecast expenditure for 1994 is £22·7 million, of which the United Kingdom share will be £3·86 million.

The total budgeted cost of the transfer of the WEU secretariat to Brussels, including the provision of buildings and facilities, was £4·55 million, of which the United Kingdom share was £773,000.

Army Pay and Personnel Unit

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many sites are currently being considered for the new location of the Army pay and personnel unit;

(2) how many military and civilian posts will be allocated to the Army pay and personnel unit.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on 4 March, *Official Report*, column *229*, I announced that representations received during the consultation period which followed the decision to locate the Army personnel centre in Glasgow would be considered before final decisions were made. A detailed review of the available options has been undertaken and I am now in a position to report the outcome. The review was conducted against the requirement that the Army personnel centre, comprising some 1,300 military and civilian personnel, should be located in the vicinity of one of the six existing Army manning, record and pay offices at Glasgow, Chester, York, Leicester, Ashton-under-Lyne and Exeter. The opportunity was also taken to review what alternative existed to a new purchase or lease of office accommodation.

The review considered all the options against common criteria and in particular all the costs involved, which in the case of existing commercial buildings included both the initial purchase price and costs of modification and any minor build required. The outcome was to show that the total cost of locating the Army personnel centre in existing Ministry of Defence office accommodation in Glasgow at Kentigern house would be some £6 million; that the overall cost of the building in Stockport referred to in my answer on 4 March would be some £15 million; that of the commercial building in Glasgow which formed the original proposal some £25 million; and the total cost of other options for an existing commercial building or new build would be in the range between £14 million and £24 million. Accordingly, in view of the significant saving over other options, I have concluded that, subject to consultation with the trades unions, siting the centre in Kentigern house represents the best possible value for money. The aim will be to complete the relocation during 1995.

Kentigern house was purpose built to Ministry of Defence requirements; with some modification to its internal layout, returning the building to open plan office space, together with the application of new office space guidelines, it will be possible to meet the key requirements of the Army personnel centre. The accommodation will be sufficient to house the centre in its entirety, and with the additional flexibility offered by Wellesley house, all MOD staff based in Glasgow will be accommodated satisfactorily. A consultative document has been prepared and is being passed to the trades unions. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The consultation period will last until 25 June and I hope to make a final decision shortly after that taking into account the representations received.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 May 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates (Resignations)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates resigned for reasons other than age in each quarter since January 1988.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In the Lord Chancellor's area of responsibility, the figures for each of the quarters referred to, save for this year and the first quarter of 1992 cannot be given without disproportionate cost. Figures for the Duchy of Lancaster, where available, are shown in brackets. The number of losses for the years in the question and for the first quarter of 1992 and 1993, but excluding those justices who reached the statutory retirement age, are as follows:

	Number
1988	659
1989	799
1990	794
1991	820 (167)
	First quarter
1992	256 (40)
1992	1,034 (165)
	First quarter
1993	261 (37)

EDUCATION

Osteopathy

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what sources of funding are available to students who wish to pursue osteopathy courses.

Mr. Boswell: Students on designated full-time first degree and equivalent level courses in osteopathy are eligible for a mandatory award and a student loan on the terms prescribed in the relevant regulations. Other students may apply to their local education authority for a discretionary award, the availability and amount of which is for the authority to determine.

Special Needs Education

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration he is giving to the report from the National Curriculum Council: "Special Needs and the national curriculum: Opportunity and Challenge"; if he will extend the national curriculum to take account of the recommendation of this report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: This leaflet, which the National Curriculum Council has recently sent to my right hon. Friend, summarises a wide-ranging review of issues concerning the relationship of pupils with special educational needs to the national curriculum. It highlights some important matters and suggests some ways forward for schools.

The national curriculum is appropriate for the great majority of children. A very small number may not be able to study across the whole of its range, or reach the levels generally appropriate to their age, and arrangements are in place to allow the modification of the curriculum as appropriate to each individual child.

In respect of exceptionally able children, there is no need for the modification of the curriculum to enable them to work at an appropriate pace and challenge, since the national curriculum sets out only a minimum entitlement, and schools are free to extend this work with individual children.

My right hon. Friend agrees with the National Curriculum Council that involvement in the national curriculum in itself means that pupils' entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum is addressed.

Conductive Education

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will publish the report by Birmingham university on the effectiveness of conductive education as practised at the Institute for Conductive Education in Birmingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I am pleased to be able to announce that the full report, containing a description of the methodology of the research and details of its findings, will be published today. Copies of the report are being placed in the Library of the House.

Teachers

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the figures for teacher numbers and vacancies for January 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: The annual survey of teacher numbers and vacancies shows that teacher numbers in England rose between January 1992 and January 1993, and that the vacancy rates in January 1993 were the lowest ever recorded. Vacancies have fallen to only 1,343 this year. This is good news for schools. It represents a further 30 per cent. fall in vacancies, to little more than one vacancy for every 20 schools. The fall is even more marked in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. Provisional teacher numbers in LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools and self-governing state schools rose by 0·2 per cent. from 394,900 full-time equivalent teachers in January 1992 to 395,600. The estimated overall pupil to teacher ratio is 17·66:1.

I am placing fuller details of the vacancy figures in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Reclaim the Streets Campaign

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Ministers in his Department have received a London Transport travelcard from the Reclaim the Streets Action Campaign; and what use each of those Ministers who received one made of the card for official journeys by *(a)* bus *(b)* tube or *(c)* rail in the week including 15 May.

Mr. Norris: I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport have received London Transport travelcards from the Reclaim the Streets Action Campaign. It would not be appropriate to accept these cards. We shall therefore be returning them to the campaign organisers.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue will be raised from vehicle excise duty in 1993.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The latest forecast for the financial year 1993-94 is £3,690 million net.

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department expects to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Greenwich concerning Oxleas wood, dated 13 October 1992 and 3 March 1993.

Mr. Norris: I have written today to the hon. Member to explain that I had thought it right to delay my reply until matters in the Court of Appeal and with the European Commission have been resolved.

Crossrail

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the reports commissioned from private consultants concerning the crossrail proposals.

Mr. Norris: No. The reports contain commercially sensitive information. If it is decided that crossrail should proceed as a joint venture with the private sector, a great deal of the information will be published.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to make an announcement as to the location of the new midlands channel tunnel terminal.

Mr. Freeman: This is a commercial matter for British Rail in co-operation with the private sector. The Government have no plans at present to make an announcement.

Buses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the level of pollution from diesel exhaust emissions of buses one year old up to seven years old.

Mr. Freeman: No assessment has been made which specifically addresses pollution arising from buses. However, the Department has an extensive research programme looking at control technology and other measures to reduce emissions. In the light of the results of this research, the Government will consider the need for a feasibility of establishing emission requirements for specific categories of vehicles, for example buses, operating in the urban environment.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of buses currently in operation which are not controlled by European Community legislation on account of the age of the vehicle.

Mr. Freeman: There is currently no European Community legislation relating specifically to the construction of buses, although buses are affected by a number of EC directives setting technical standards for varous aspects of motor vehicles. We have no estimate of the number of buses affected, which will depend on the precise requirements of the many directives in question, the date on which they came into effect and the manner in which they are applied in United Kingdom law.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Safety

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the cost to the food industry in a full year of implementing the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Soames: The Food Safety Act 1990 is an enabling piece of legislation which, of itself, does not require any additional expenditure by food businesses. The requirements that it places directly on businesses relating to food safety and consumer protection are couched in general terms, and are no more than any prudent well-run business would involve itself in as part of ensuring its good reputation with its customers. It is, therefore, not possible specifically to identify the cost to the industry of complying with the Act.

Research Strategy Documents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many copies of his departmental reports on *(a)* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food environmental research strategy and requirement document 1993-95 and *(b)* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food arable crops and horticulture research strategy document 1993-95 have been printed; at what cost; and to whom they have been distributed.

Mr. Curry: One thousand five hundred copies of *(a)* the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food environmental research strategy and requirement document 1993-95 and 800 copies of *(b)* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food arable crops and horticulture research strategy document 1993-95 have been printed, at a total cost of £3,880. They have been distributed to contractors and other parties known to have an interest in research and development, and publicised more widely by means of a press notice.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to seek the adoption in the European Community of siphoning on transfers of milk quotas so as to provide a pool of quotas for new entrants under the age of 40 years into farming in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: The Government have no plans to do so. However, we shall be looking to see whether any lessons

for milk quotas may be drawn from experience in the operation of quotas in the sheep and suckler cow sectors, where arrangements for new entrants have been proposed.

Research Expenditure

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what cuts in expenditure in near-market strategic and basic research have been implemented since 1978; and if he will list the size of his Ministry's budget and the numbers of projects and personnel employed with respect to each of the subject areas outlined in "MAFF NR 143/91" in nominal and real terms for each year since 1978.

Mr. Gummer: Research projects are not classified routinely in the terms specified in the question. However, near-market projects, by definition, would seldom, if ever, be expected to fall into the strategic or basic research categories.

My Department's expenditure in cash and real terms on environmental R and D by subject area is set out in the table. The number of projects is shown in brackets. Individual projects differ in value.

Subject area	*1991-92*		*1992-93*		*1993-94*	
	£ million cash	*£ million real[1] terms*	*£ million cash*	*£ million real[1] terms*	*£ million cash*	*£ million real[1] terms*
Protecting the countryside	1·6 (16)	1·6	1·7 (19)	1·6	1·7 (20)	1·6
Farm woodland and set aside	2·7 (20)	2·7	2·7 (21)	2·5	2·8 (16)	2·6
Protecting water supplies and rivers	7·1 (39)	7·1	8·1 (61)	7·8	7·9 (60)	7·4
Soil protection	1·5 (16)	1·5	1·4 (21)	1·4	1·7 (19)	1·6
Protecting the air	1·6 (15)	1·6	1·6 (15)	1·5	1·8 (17)	1·7
Pest and pesticides	21·3(174)	21·3	22·2(172)	21·5	20·0(158)	18·8
Flood and coastal defence and climate change	3·0 (63)	3·0	3·7 (76)	3·6	4·0 (71)	3·7
Marine protection	3·5 (32)	3·5	3·6 (31)	3·5	3·8 (29)	3·6
Genetic conservation and modification at RBG, Kew	8·7 (—)	8·7	10·3 (—)	10·0	9·1 (—)	8·6
Protecting fisheries	4·7 (81)	4·7	5·1 (69)	5·0	5·2 (67)	4·9
Totals	55·8(456)	55·8	60·4(485)	58·4	58·0(457)	54·5

[1] Using GDP deflator 1991-92 = 100.

Figures for years before 1991-92 are not available in the form requested.

No information is held centrally about the number of personnel employed on each subject area.

Bovine Eyes

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether bovine eyes are used in food for human consumption in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: I am aware of the suggestion that bovine eyes are used in meat products. All the main meat industry organisations have assured me that they have no evidence of any use of bovine eyes in food. Moreover, the British Meat Manufacturers Association has pointed out that under its accredited standard scheme eyes are totally banned from use in meat preparations and meat products by their members.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to privatise the Northern Ireland electricity service; what estimate of asset proceeds he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The first phase of the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland—the trade sale of the four existing power stations to three private sector companies—was completed in March 1992. The second phase—the floatation of Northern Ireland Electricity plc on the stock exchange—is due to take place in June 1993. The sale of the four power stations realised some £350 million. It is too early to provide an estimate of proceeds from the floatation of NIE plc, details of which will be announced in due course.

Fishing Permits

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce a concessionary rate game fishing permit for pensioners for Northern Ireland at the same level as is applicable in Great Britain.

Mr. Hanley: No. The legislation which governs angling licensing in Northern Ireland does not provide the flexibility to issue licences at concessionary rates except, in limited circumstances, to outside visitors.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Tests

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he now expects the report by the National Radiological Protection Board into the effects of radiation on veterans of British nuclear tests to be published; how this relates to the orginal envisaged publication date; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The National Radiological Protection Board anticipates that a report will be sent for

peer review to a recognised scientific journal in the late summer or early autumn of 1993, with a view to publication as soon as possible thereafter later in the year.

Delays have been caused by changes in scope made by the National Radiological Protection Board to update their final report. These changes include the incorporation of all deaths of participants up to 1 January 1991 rather than 1 January 1989 as originally envisaged and of a detailed case study into the effects of emigration and a more complete check of mortality and cause of death.

The Government are not aware of any evidence which would change the conclusions of the National Radiological Protection Board report published in 1988 that the overall incidence of cancer among nuclear test participants is no greater than that among the population as a whole.

Child Migrant Trust

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister when he received the letter of 4 May from Nottinghamshire county council regarding the Child Migrant Trust; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The letter was received on 6 May and was acknowledged.

Ms Beata Brookes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister what reference he has made to the public appointments unit in relation to the appointment of Ms Beata Brookes as chairman of the Welsh Consumer Council in 1991; what account he has taken of whether the chairman of the Wales area of the Conservative and Unionist party carries out executive duties; and how his policy on such appointments has changed since his answer of 28 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *608*.

The Prime Minister: The public appointments unit is consulted in seeking nominations for all appointments to public boards, including the chairmanship of the Welsh Consumer Council, as are a number of other bodies. As chairwoman of the Wales area of the Conservative and Unionist party, Miss Brookes is not an officer carrying out executive duties in the party. Her role does not, therefore, conflict with the long-standing and now publicly available guidelines for members of public boards on political activities. This is in line with the answer I gave on 28 November at column *608*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Allivane International

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 May 1992, *Official Report*,column *77*, whether Customs and Excise has decided upon prosecution against Allivane International.

Sir John Cope: No prosecution has been commenced against Allivane International.

Indirect Taxation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the retail prices index is expected to rise as a result of the increase in indirect taxes in the current Budget; and if he will disregard the effect of that increase on the rate of inflation in formulating his economic policies.

Mr. Portillo: The Budget measures add ¼ per cent. to the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments in 1993 compared with the autumn statement forecast, and a further ½ per cent. by the second quarter of 1994.

The Government's objective is to keep underlying inflation within a range of 1 to 4 per cent., and to bring it down to the lower part of this range by the end of this Parliament; monetary policy will be set to achieve this.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward legislation to extend 100 per cent. of inheritance tax relief in respect of farms which are let.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Interest Rates

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current base rate in each EC member state.

Mr. Nelson: Short-term market interest rates in each European Community country were as follows on 12 May:

	Interest rates
United Kingdom	5·8
Germany	7·4
France	7·8
Italy	11·0
Spain	15·4
Netherlands	7·5
Belgium	7·2
Denmark	10·9
Greece	23·0
Portugal	18·0
Ireland	8·1

Inflation

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current rate of inflation in each EC member state.

Mr. Nelson: Data for inflation rates in each European Community country are published in the OECD's main economic indicators. The latest figures show that only Denmark of the European Community countries has a lower headline inflation rate than the United Kingdom.

Gilts

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about information on gilts and the gilt-edged market.

Mr. Nelson: The Bank of England will be issuing on 17 May a new guide providing information for institutional investors about gilts and the operation of the gilt-edged market.

The costs of producing the booklet will fall to the Treasury's 1993-94 vote—class XVII, vote 1. parliamentary approval for this new expenditure will be sought in a

summer supplementary estimate. The resulting increase in the Treasury's cash limit and gross running costs limit will be fully offset by a reduction in the Bank of England's cash limit and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *764*, whether the rules regarding the provision of car benefits are in practice implemented for Ministers in exactly the same way as the Inland Revenue expects them to be implemented for employees in general.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 May 1993]*: The same rules apply to Ministers as to other employees, and the Inland Revenue seeks to apply the law even-handedly to Ministers and to others.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage increase for each of the 10 commodities whose prices have increased the most on the commodities markets since the pound left the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 10 May 1993]*: Of the 30 main commodities that make up *The Economist* all-items commodity price index, the 10 that have increased in price the most since the 15 September 1992 are shown in the table.

Commodity price rises: 15 September 1992 to 5 May 1993

(Per cent.)

Commodity	*Dollar prices*	*SDR prices*	*Sterling prices*
Timber	90·1	93·0	126·9
Sisal	24·8	26·7	48·9
Sugar	22·3	24·2	46·0
Groundnut oil	17·9	19·7	40·7
Coffee	16·1	17·9	38·6
Beef	13·6	15·4	35·6
Soyabean meal	8·4	10·1	29·4
Lamb	7·9	9·6	28·8
Soyabean oil	6·2	7·8	26·7
Cotton	5·3	6·9	25·7
All-items	1·1	4·1	21·9

Source: The Economist

Company Cars

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what benefits-in-kind an employer should report on the form P11D in respect of an employee who is driven from home to his normal place of employment in a chauffeur-driven car provided by his employer.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 May 1993]*: If the car is a pooled car and the journeys are merely incidental to the business use of the car, the employer should make no return.

In other circumstances, the employer should return on form P11D the benefit of the car and the costs of the chauffeur.

Whether or not an employee's private use of a car is incidental to its business use will depend on the facts of each particular case. If employers or employees are in any doubt about the correct treatment, they should consult their tax office.

European Community (Convergence)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what requests he has received from institutions of the European Community for a report on their programme for attaining convergence within the economies of the Community; what reply has been sent; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Nelson *[pursuant to his reply, 30 March 1993, c. 147]*: The United Kingdom has today submitted a convergence programme. A copy of this programme is being placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if Ministers in his Department are ordinarily allocated their own ministerial car.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 13 May 1993]*: Ministers are provided with first-call cars from the Government car service pool.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Hosni E. Farhat

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received regarding the implications for administrative routines within the Law Officers Department of the case of Hosni E. Farhat.

The Attorney-General: None.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on contacts between prosecution witnesses in the case of Hosni E. Farhat and Ahmed Gaddafi Aidain of Libya; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: None.

Unemployment Benefit (Appeals)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General how many appeals relating to unemployment benefit were heard by social security appeals tribunals in 1992; and in how many cases the appeal succeeded wholly or in part.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 11 May 1993]*: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not available in the form requested. The latest information, which covers the first nine months of 1992, indicates that 12,327 unemployment benefit appeals were heard and decided of which 5,310 were decided in the appellant's favour.

HEALTH

Regional Health Authorities (Consultancy Companies)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to recover inappropriate loans and illegal payments to consultancy companies and related businesses employed by regional health authorities.

Mr. Sackville: Recovery action is a matter for the authorities concerned. The Department closely monitors progress.

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for excluding terminations of pregnancy from the list of goods and services which general practitioner fund holders may purchase elsewhere when they are not available locally; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The list of goods and services is currently limited to procedures which all fund holders are required to purchase on behalf of their patients where clinically indicated. Some general practitioners for ethical reasons are unable to refer patients for termination of pregnancy and such GPs could not be required to purchase these services.

Alternative Medicine

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to health authorities and general practice fund holders on the purchase of complementary and alternative medical services.

Dr. Mawhinney: Our guidance makes it clear that we expect general practitioner fund holders to purchase high-quality and cost-effective care. We have not issued guidance on purchasing specific services as this is a matter of clinical judgment. Fund holders may employ alternative practitioners using the staff element of their fund.

Child Mortality

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths of children under 18 years by age and sex, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of deaths of children under 18 years of age in England and Wales by age and sex registered in the years 1979 to 1991

Year and sex	Total deaths	Age in years				
		Under 1	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 17
1979						
Male	7,420	4,731	641	602	605	841
Female	5,059	3,447	527	368	386	331
1980						
Male	7,051	4,471	668	517	546	849
Female	5,038	3,428	518	349	373	370
1981						
Male	6,640	4,119	651	447	573	850
Female	4,461	2,902	529	302	368	360
1982						
Male	6,317	3,914	652	391	546	814
Female	4,288	2,861	485	253	353	336
1983						
Male	5,933	3,654	604	391	514	770
Female	4,160	2,727	489	269	332	343
1984						
Male	5,624	3,443	610	348	501	722
Female	3,956	2,594	454	260	302	346
1985						
Male	5,651	3,510	638	328	503	672
Female	4,008	2,631	497	260	308	312
1986						
Male	5,682	3,724	573	325	380	680
Female	3,890	2,589	491	248	272	290
1987						
Male	5,580	3,637	578	309	404	652
Female	3,878	2,635	489	237	246	271
1988						
Male	5,639	3,649	587	374	402	627
Female	3,866	2,621	498	232	218	297
1989						
Male	5,318	3,368	606	371	337	636
Female	3,641	2,440	472	241	226	262
1990						
Male	5,105	3,207	593	333	338	634
Female	3,499	2,357	434	220	230	258
1991						
Male	4,771	2,966	554	341	354	556
Female	3,350	2,192	439	248	222	249

Year and sex	Total deaths	Age in years: Under 1	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 17
1992						
Male	4,147	2,606	487	302	322	430
Female	2,953	1,933	387	214	199	220

Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female consultants are working between one and 11 sessions per week, broken down by number of sessions.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants by contracted notional half-days (NHD) England—30 September 1991

NHD	Consultants: Male	Female
Under 1	15	5
1 to less than 2	54	6
2 to less than 3	32	16
3 to less than 4	53	22
4 to less than 5	45	19
5 to less than 6	98	73
6 to less than 7	92	102
7 to less than 8	97	72
8 to less than 9	105	81
9 to less than 10	397	105
10 to less than 11	17	0
11	10,891	1,829
Total	11,895	2,329

Note:
(a) Figures do not include honorary consultants
(b) Totals do not add due to rounding up/down
(c) Both full-time and maximum part-time consultants are shown as working 11 NHDs.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female consultants are working part and full time.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants by sex and nature of contract England (whole-time equivalent) 30 September 1991

	Consultants: Male	Female	Total
Full time	6,328	1,452	7,780
Maximum part time	4,563	377	4,940
Part time	1,004	500	1,504
Total	11,895	2,329	14,224

Note: Figures do not include honorary consultants.

Pharmacists

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to reject any proposals to end payments of allowances to pharmacists who dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are exploring a range of options for restructuring pharmacists' pay. Consultations are continuing and no options have yet been ruled out.

Pharmacies (West Midlands)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of pharmacies in the west midlands; and how many dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

Dr. Mawhinney: In the west midlands, all the 227 pharmacists dispensed fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month in 1991-92, the latest year for which figures are available.

NHS Patients

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many in-patients were treated by the national health service in England in 1992 and in 1979;

(2) how many out-patients were treated by the national health service in England in 1992 and in 1979.

Mr. Sackville: In 1991-92, there were 7,759,000 in-patients and 36,941,000 out-patients treated in the NHS in England. This information is based on counts of finished consultant episodes. In 1979, 5,400,000 in-patients and 34,100,000 out-patients were treated. In-patient information for 1979 is based on numbers of discharges and deaths and is, therefore, not directly comparable.

Source:
1979 In-patients Form SH3
1991-92 KP70 Finished Consultant Episodes (these figures include over 500,000 well babies)
Out-patients 1979 Form SH3, 1991-92 KH09 and KH18 Returns

Operations

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations the national health service performed in England in 1992 and in 1979.

Mr. Sackville: In 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available, an estimated 3·8 million non-maternity operations were performed in the national health service in England. The information is based on counts of finished consultant episodes. In 1979, there were 2·5 million non-maternity operations. Information for 1979 is based on numbers of discharges and deaths and is, not therefore, directly comparable.

Source: Hospital In-Patient Enquiry 1979
Hospital Episode Statistics 1989-90

Deaf People (Sight Tests)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which representatives of deaf and hard of hearing people she consulted prior to her decision to exclude them from free sight tests;

(2) what representations she received from deaf and hard of hearing people concerning the introduction of charges for eye tests.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are not aware that any representations were made by deaf and hard of hearing people when charges for sight tests were introduced on 1 April 1989; nor were their representatives consulted.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many transplants were carried out in the years 1991 and 1992 of *(a)* kidneys, *(b)* hearts, *(c)* livers and *(d)* hearts and lungs;

(2) what estimate she has of how many people died in the years 1991 and 1992 while waiting for organ transplants.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the numbers of solid organ transplants carried out in the United Kingdom in 1991 and 1992[1].

Year	*Cadaveric kidneys*	*Hearts*	*Livers*	*Hearts and lungs*	*Lungs*
1991	1,628	281	420	79	72
1992	1,641	301	501	53	89

[1] Figures supplied by United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority. 1992 figures are provisional.

There are no figures available centrally on people who die while waiting for kidney transplantation, but in 1991, the only year for which such figures are available, deaths of people awaiting other organs were as follows: hearts 69, livers 33, hearts and lungs 41, lungs 16[1]. Causes of death are not recorded.

Sefton General Hospital

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are treated annually at Sefton general hospital's chest clinic; how wide is the catchment area from which they are drawn; how many staff are employed in the unit; where it is to be relocated; what is the future of the jobs of the clinic staff; and what estimate has been made of travelling times and costs of patients currently being treated at Sefton general.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. Tod, the chairman of Liverpool health authority, for details.

Computers

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual expenditure within the national health service on *(a)* computers in hospital and *(b)* computers in general practice for each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* The available information for 1990-91 and 1991-92 is shown in the table.

Hospital and community health services (HCHS)
Expenditure on computers and computing

£ thousands (cash)

	Purchase of hardware and operational software	*Revenue Maintenance of hardware and software (including licensing fees)*	*Contract services*	*Capital Purchase of hardware and operational software*
	£ thousands	*£ thousands*	*£ thousands*	*£ thousands*
1990-91	61,538	44,216	28,809	119,233
1991-92	49,871	65,268	35,281	[1]31,710

[1] Main frame systems only. Excludes an element within a total of £103·5 million for office and information technology equipment. (Note 2 to the table refers).

General medical services—expenditure on computers

Year	*£000 (cash)*
1990-91	17,449
1991-92	34,117

Sources:

a. Annual accounts (1990-91) and annual financial returns (1991-92) of regional and district health authorities in England and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

b. 1991-92 annual financial returns of the first wave NHS Trusts.

c. Financial information system (FIS) returns of family health services authorities (1990-91 and 1991-92).

Notes to the table:

1. HCHS covers all services directly managed or accounted for by the health authorities (and NHS Trusts) including hospital, community health, patient transport (ie ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.

2. The HCHS figures for 1991-92 (which are derived from annual financial returns rather than accounts) are provisional. Following the introduction of capital asset accounting and changes to the analyses provided in annual financial returns the figure for capital expenditure is not comparable with that for 1990-91. It represents expenditure only on mainframe information technology (IT) systems and excludes additional expenditure on computers within a total of some £103·5 million for "office and IT equipment" and which is not separately identifiable centrally. Revenue "purchases" may include elements for rent and leasing.

3. The figures for general medical services are the costs of direct reimbursements made by family health service authorities to general medical practitioners for computers.

4. The table excludes costs incurred by family health services authorities on their administrative functions etc., and by special health authorities providing central services to the national health service.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability, Living Allowance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the turnround of correspondence relating to disability living allowance applications met his targets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The arrangements for replying to correspondence relating to operational questions on disability living allowance are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 13 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the targets for the turnround of correspondence on Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

I would refer to my letter to you of 25 February 1993 in response to an earlier question from you on this matter (Official Report 25 February 1993, Column 751). As I explained in that letter, the Agency is responding to the majority of letters on DLA now being received from Members within 20 working days. In April 61 per cent. of the letters I sent on DLA were within the 20 day target. In additiion the DLA Unit is now responding within 20 working days on 79 per cent. of the letters they receive direct from Members.

The percentage of cases cleared within 20 days is continuing to increase. It is my firm intention that by the end of May the vast majority of letters on DLA will be replied to within the 20 day target.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings would be made by restricting child benefit to households which have total incomes of *(a)* 80 per cent., *(b)* 100 per cent., *(c)* 120 per cent. of (i) average earnings and (ii) average household income.

Mr. Burt: If child benefit were restricted to households with less than *(a)* 80 per cent., *(b)* 100 per cent., and *(c)* 120 per cent. of average gross male earnings, it is estimated that benefit savings of *(a)* £4 billion, *(b)* £3·2 billion and *(c)* £2·4 billion would accrue.

If child benefit were restricted to households with less than *(a)* 80 per cent., *(b)* 100 per cent., and *(c)* 120 per cent. of average gross household income, it is estimated that benefit savings of *(a)* £3·9 billion, *(b)* £3 billion and *(c)* £2·2 billion would accrue.

The estimates are made at 1993-94 levels, based on 1988, 1989, and 1990 family expenditure surveys, and the 1992 new earnings survey. The estimates assume that families in receipt of income-related benefits are not compensated for any loss in child benefit.

WALES

Council House Sales

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been total sales proceeds from the sale of council houses in Wales to date since 1981; and how much has been *(a)* allocated from proceeds to develop social housing and *(b)* held in local authority bank accounts or short-term investments.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Between 1 April 1981 and 31 March 1992, receipts including the repayment of principal on local authority mortgages from the sale of council housing amounted to £793 million. Information on the allocation of the receipts from the sale of council housing to develop social housing and the amounts held in local authority bank accounts or short-term investments is not held centrally.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated asset base of local authority housing stock in Wales net of debt.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the value of local authority housing stock is not collected centrally. However, the national value of housing revenue account dwellings at 1 April 1993, net of accumulated debt, was assumed, for HRA subsidy purposes only, to be £4·5 billion.

Consultancy Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the operation of and future of consultancy services provided under the enterprise initiative in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The consultancy services available under the enterprise initiative are provided by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and delivered in Wales on his behalf by the Welsh Development Agency. On 10 March, my right hon. Friend announced that the scheme will continue until 31 March 1994 with reduced rates of subsidy, thus allowing development of a new and more flexible package of support services within the available resources.

Small Businesses

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to encourage the growth of the small business sector in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: As well as helping entrepreneurs set up new businesses through the business start-up programme, I support a broad range of measures designed to help existing small businesses to grow. Measures include regional selective assistance, regional enterprise grant, Enterprise Wales consultancy support, overseas trade missions and export advice, skills development support and technology initiatives.

In October 1992, I set up the enterprise and business support working group with representatives from the public and private sectors. The group has been comprehensively reviewing business support services in Wales and will shortly be making recommendations, particularly about improving access for the small business man to available assistance. A range of other measures which assist the small business sector include:

Regional Selective Assistance, Regional Enterprise Grant

Small businesses continue to take advantage of the help available under regional selective assistance. In the year to end of April 1993, 124 small firms, employing up to 200 people, accepted offers of RSA. The value of these offers amount to £21·7 million. A further 156 small firms, employing fewer than 25 people, or 50 in the case of innovation projects, accepted offers of regional enterprise grant totalling £2·24 million.

Enterprise Wales

Launched in January 1988, the consultancy initiatives have proved extremely popular in Wales. More than 6,476 companies have applied. In 1992-93 alone, 1,299 applicants were received, 30 per cent. above the economic weight, and 1,186 business reviews were commissioned, 42 per cent. above the economic weight.

Overseas Trade Services
My Department's overseas trade services branch provides in Wales those export advisory services which are made available by the Department of Trade and Industry in England. In addition, I have recently introduced for small and medium-sized enterprises based in Wales, a programme of 24 subsidised trade missions over the next three years.
A trade fair representative service, which allows small firms to place their literature at selected trade fairs, which I initiated last year, has already begun to pay dividends for many of the participating firms.

Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology (SMART)
The number of small Welsh companies which received a SMART stage 1 award during the past 12 months was 16, and nine companies received the SMART stage 2 awards. The maximum value of each stage 1 award is £45,000 and the maximum award is £60,000. On a per-capita basis, Wales has continued to do better than most other regions in this annual competition, receiving about 9 per cent. of the total awards nationwide.

Support for Products Under Research (SPUR)
This scheme, which was introduced in 1991 is intended to support highly innovative projects by companies employing up to 500 persons. During the second year of its operation, offers of financial assistance were made to nine Welsh companies, to a total value of £960,443.

Managing in the 90s
Managing in the 90s is an umbrella scheme encompassing a number of programmes designed to encourage the growth of small and medium sized businesses. Initially focusing on four areas of industrial performance—design, production, purchasing and quality—it has recently been expanded to include marketing and new product introduction.

WDA and DBRW
The Welsh Development Agency provides established small businesses with advice and financial support to assist their growth, helps them to establish business links in other EC countries and helps them to exploit new technologies. The agency also seeks to ensure that an adequate supply of industrial and commercial workspace is available.
The Development Board for Rural Wales has delivered a comprehensive programme to stimulate interest in business creation and to help business start-ups. This has been achieved by establishing a network of seven business centres in partnership with the region's local authorities and local enterprise agencies. In 1992-93 the agencies provided a total of £273,000 in direct grant support to Wales's 22 local enterprise agencies.

Training and Enterprise Councils
The training and enterprise councils in Wales are responsible for running a range of measures which assist small businesses. They are continuing to develop provision to help new and existing businesses to acquire and build on skills which will enable them to compete and grow. During the last financial year, Welsh TECs trained more than 12,700 owner-managers and helped more than 2,676 people to start their own new businesses. In addition TECs handled over 41,000 inquiries through business information services and provided 8,800 counselling sessions for new and existing small businesses.

Disability Payments

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to empower local authorities in Wales to make direct payments to people with disabilities following the completion of needs assessments.

Mr. David Hunt: No. Now is not the time to be adding to local authorities' very full agendas. Direct payments are, and should continue to be, the province of the social security system.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Welsh Office made known the necessity of completion of the integrated administration and control system forms to Welsh farmers and the farming unions.

Mr. David Hunt: Following the publication in December of the Commission regulations on the integrated administration and control system, Agriculture Departments issued a joint press notice on 13 January announcing further details of the claim procedures for arable aid payments. In the same notice, we alerted livestock producers to the fact that they, too, would need to comply with the general arrangements relating to IACS.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what day the European Community directive for the preparation of integrated administration and control system forms was communicated to the Welsh Office.

Mr. David Hunt: The governing Commission regulations were published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 31 December 1992.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Welsh Office made known to Welsh farmers and the farming unions that the integrated administration and control system forms should be completed using black ink; and when that requirement was communicated to the Welsh Office by the European Commission.

Mr. David Hunt: The explanatory booklet on the integrated administration and control system, available from 2 April, advises farmers to make copies of the forms they submit and, therefore, recommends that they are completed clearly and in black ink in order to make photocopying easier.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Toxic Waste Exports

Ms Abbott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the forms of industrial toxic waste exported from the United Kingdom and their destinations, identifying third world destinations separately, and the quantities involved, over the last 12 months.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to her of 19 April 1993, *Official Report*, column *44*.

Animal Experimentation (Cosmetics)

Mr. Hoon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to support any moves to strengthen the common position on the proposed cosmetics directive with respect to the phasing out of cosmetic tests on animals when it is discussed by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Leigh: The common position on the proposed sixth Council amendment to the EC cosmetics directive agreed by the member states under the United Kingdom presidency last year represents a fair and reasonable balance between the concerns of those who wish to phase out testing on animals of the ingredients of personal care products and the need to protect the consumer by ensuring

that alternative non-animal tests are validated. I do not believe there is scope for strengthening the measure without jeopardising the proposal as a whole.

Trading Standards

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the cost to British industry of implementing the trading standards regulations.

Mr. Leigh: No such estimate has yet been made. However, as part of the deregulation initiative, the Department of Trade and Industry is reviewing all the regulations for which it is responsible.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions were brought by trading standards officers in each of the last five years; and what percentage of *(a)* cases and *(b)* contested cases resulted in prosecution.

Mr. Leigh: In England and Wales the numbers of prosecutions brought by trading standards departments have been as follows:

	Numbers
1987-88	10,921
1988-89	12,682
1989-90	9,921
1990-91	10,469
1991-92	10,425

In Scotland, the numbers of prosecutions resulting from investigations made by standards trading departments and brought by the Crown through the procurators fiscal have been as follows:

	Numbers
1987-88	355
1988-89	383
1989-90	300
1990-91	220
1991-92	267

Information about the number and outcome of comparable prosecutions in Northern Ireland and about the outcome of prosecutions in England, Wales and Scotland is not readily available.

Deregulation Task Forces

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what remuneration or other benefits and expenses the members of the deregulation task forces receive; and on what basis such remunerations were calculated.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The chairmen and members of the deregulation task forces receive no remuneration, but are eligible to apply for travel and subsistence expenses on standard civil service terms.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade from what date the six months life of the deregulation task forces is regarded as commencing.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The deregulation task forces were launched on 19 March 1993.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the membership of each deregulation task force, and the approximate number of regulations allocated to each task force.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A complete list of deregulation task force members has been placed in the Library. Each task force has been surveying the whole range of Government regulation as it applies to its sector.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it will be open to deregulation task forces to propose extensions of existing legal provisions.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The deregulation task forces are free to make any recommendations they wish, within their broad remit to advise Ministers on priorities for deregulation and on ensuring a continuing voice for business in the regulatory process.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his intention to publish the reports of the deregulation task forces.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The deregulation task forces will not be producing formal reports. They will be giving advice to Ministers which will feed into the public debate on deregulation.

Car Exports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cars were exported from Britain to Japan in 1978 and in 1992.

Mr. Needham: In 1992, more than 11,700 passenger cars were exported from Britain to Japan, compared with almost 3,400 cars exported to Japan in 1978.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Darling: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the number of commitment wells required to be drilled by each licensee in each United Kingdom continental shelf sector under existing licences granted by his Department; and for what period these wells are to be drilled.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The total number of commitment wells outstanding as at 16 March 1993, to be drilled by licensees on the United Kingdom continental shelf, is 306, as follows:

	Area			
Licensing round	*Northern*	*Central*	*Southern*	*Drill by*
10th	0	4	0	1993
11th	41	60	47	1995
12th and subsequent	13	75	66	1997-2000

As licence commitments are commercial-in-confidence, I am unable to supply the numbers by individual licensee.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, how many obligations remain outstanding for drilling *(a)* firm and *(b)* contingent wells under the 11th and 12th United Kingdom offshore licensing rounds.

Mr. Eggar *[pursuant to his reply, 29 April 1993, c. 493]:* I have now been informed that there are 296 outstanding obligation wells from the 11th and 12th rounds of offshore licensing. Of these, 185 are firm obligations and 111 are conditional.

Welsh Consumer Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the annual salary of the chairman of the Welsh Consumer Council.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* The appointment of chairman of the Welsh Consumer Council attracts a salary of £4,600 per annum, plus as a member of the National Consumer Council, an additional £4,600 per annum, both of which are subject to tax and national insurance.

"The Observer"

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will make a statement on the proposed sale of *The Observer*.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his reply, 30 April 1993, c. 560-61]:* I have today received an application for my consent to the proposed transfer of *The Observer* newspaper to Guardian Newspapers Ltd, a subsidiary of The Guardian and Manchester Evening News plc. The application invites me to give my consent without a Monopolies and Mergers Commission reference under section 58(3)(a) of the Fair Trading Act 1973. This section gives me discretion to consent to a newspaper transfer without an MMC inquiry where I am satisfied that the newspaper concerned is not economic as a going concern and as a separate newspaper, and that, if the paper is to continue, the case is one of urgency.

I should like to reach a decision as quickly as possible on whether the application falls within section 58(3)(a) of the Act, and if so whether I should give my consent without requiring an MMC report. I am, therefore, inviting comments from interested parties by 21 May. Any person wishing to comment should write by 5 pm on 21 May to:

Mr P Sack
Department of Trade and Industry
Competition Policy Division 1B
Room 534
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6RB
Fax: 071-215 6565

SCOTLAND

Gruinard Island

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Gruinard island off Wester Ross was de-crofted during the time it was under Government control; if it was returned to crofting status when it was returned to its previous owner; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My Department has no information on the precise status of Gruinard island when the land was originally acquired by the then Ministry of Supply. The Crofters Commission has no record of the island ever being under crofting tenure. Under the Crofting Acts, any person with an interest may refer to the Scottish Land Court questions as to whether a holding is a croft.

Water Quality

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance or advice he is making available to the agricultural industry for schemes to minimise water pollution.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* The code of good practice "Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity" which the Government published in March 1992 gives comprehensive advice to farmers. Advice may also be obtained from the Scottish Agricultural College.

Grants of up to 50 per cent. are available under the farm and conservation grant scheme towards the cost of waste management facilities.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned or is conducting into the effects of agriculture on water quality in Scotland; and what sums have been allocated to such research.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* The following projects currently form part of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department's commissioned programme of agricultural and related research and development:

- Measurement, modelling and prevention of transfer of pollutants from land to aquatic systems.
- Development of methods and a computer programme for treatment of livestock wastes and regulation of waste management systems.
- Protozoan, bacterial and viral pathogens, farm animal wastes and water quality protection.
- Biological mechanisms in mass algal cultures controlling the emission of nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon from animal wastes.
- Use of photobioreactor to investigate the influence of irradiance, light/dark cycles and carbon dioxide concentration on the growth of microalgae and their application to waste treatment and biotechnology.
- The effect of livestock farming (beef and dairy cattle) activities on catchment water quality.
- Use of geographical information systems techniques with process-based environmental assessment procedures for water quality modelling.
- Quantifying sources and sinks of acidity under selected hill land use, and their effects on water quality and quantity.
- Quantifying the principal hydrological and hydrochemical consequences of forestry in relation to soil type, atmospheric inputs and management practices.
- Water resource modelling: the effect of land use change and atmospheric deposition.
- Economic analysis of the effect of agricultural pollution on water quality and the potential for its control.

Operational research and modelling studies of environmental problems associated with silage effluent, slurry and other pollutants.

The current cost of these projects in 1993-94 is estimated to be about £0·9 million.

In addition, the Scottish Office Environment Department is funding research which is likely to improve understanding of the effects of agriculture on water quality. The work includes a study of nutrient transport in estuaries. £54,000 will be allocated to these projects in 1993-94.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effects of agriculture on water quality in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* Figures compiled by the Scottish farm waste liaison group show that in 1992 there were 400 water pollution incidents arising from agricultural operations compared with 521 in 1991. This significant drop is welcome. The Government hope that greater awareness of and compliance with the Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 will result in further improvement.

ENVIRONMENT

A40 Bypass

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the proposed A40 bypass route to the north of Oxford.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have been asked to reply

In accordance with the requirement of EC directive 85/337, as applied by section 105A of the Highways Act 1980, an environmental statement in respect of the proposed A40 north of Oxford bypass was published on 25 March 1993. This coincided with publication of draft statutory orders for the scheme.

DEFENCE

Muidden Chemie (Netherlands)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements his Department has made with Muidden Chemie (Netherlands) since 1982.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has no records of placing any contracts with this company in the last three years. Records for previous years could be checked only at disproportionate cost.

Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements his Department has with Luchaire of France for provision of military equipment.

Mr. Aitken: The value of contracts placed with Luchaire Defence SA over the last three years is as follows:

1992-93—nil

1991-92—two contracts, total value £16,832.

1990-91—five contracts, total value £2,738,356

The contracts were for a variety of grenades and associated items.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recommendation was made by Rolls-Royce and Associates in respect of reassessment of the need to establish a safety case before lifting nuclear submarines;

(2) what the criteria now are for establishing a safety case for the Faslane Trident shiplift.

Mr. Aitken: Before a nuclear-powered submarine is lifted at the Clyde submarine base it will be necessary to demonstrate that no reasonably foreseeable event, whether internal—for example, mechanical or electrical breakdown—or external—for example, extreme winds, waves, floods, tides or an earthquake—would result in catastrophic failure of the shiplift or an unacceptable risk to the general public. This is in line with practice in the civil nuclear industry. To provide confidence in the progress of the safety case, we commissioned independent advice from Rolls-Royce and Associates. The company made a number of detailed recommendations, all of which are either under consideration or already being implemented. The shiplift will not be used to lift a nuclear-powered submarine until its safety has been established to the satisfaction of the nuclear safety authorities.

Rolls-Royce and Associates

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultancies have been awarded by his Department to Rolls-Royce and Associates.

Mr. Aitken: Of some 280 current contracts between my Department and Rolls-Royce and Associates, only one is specifically for consultancy services. This was placed in 1992, and requires the preparation of reports on nuclear safety at the Clyde submarine base, Faslane. The hon. Member will appreciate that a full investigation of all past and present contracts to determine whether any consultancy services were required could be carried out only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Faslane Shiplift

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment has been supplied by Northern Engineering Industries for the shiplift project and the syncrolift, Faslane.

Mr. Aitken: Northern Engineering Industries supplied the syncrolift, control systems and five cranes.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid to firms contracted to establish the safety case for the Faslane Trident shiplift.

Mr. Aitken: Expenditure to date is estimated at £20 million.

Vanguard Class Submarines

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average surface displacement weight of the Vanguard class missile submarine.

Mr. Aitken: The surface displacement of the Vanguard class Trident missile submarine is some 14,000 tonnes.

Defence Work (Relocation)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what future plans he has to encourage the allocation of defence work and related employment to the north of England and Scotland.

Mr. Aitken: The Ministry of Defence does consider the employment implications when placing contracts, consulting the DTI and other Departments as appropriate. My Department's prime concern, as a customer, must be to obtain the best value for money for the taxpayer. It is for companies to decide where to locate their facilities and where to carry out work arising from contracts, though in so deciding they no doubt take into account the various Government measures to assist industry in particular areas. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry informed the House on 12 May, *Official Report*, column 801, of the measures being considered to help Tyneside.

Iraq (Defence Equipment)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what letter he sent to defence industry firms concerning Government policy on exports of defence equipment to Iraq in *(a)* 1984 and *(b)* 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter for Lord Justice Scott's inquiry to consider.

Documents (Destruction)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *759*, what criteria are used when considering whether or not to destroy documents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's records are reviewed in accordance with the terms of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967. No file of administrative or possible historical value is destroyed before five years after closure. Files are reviewed for permanent preservation after 25 years.

Scott Inquiry

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information resulting from recent inspections of Iraq by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations has been provided to the Scott inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: It would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail on the nature of information provided to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry, which is a matter between the inquiry and the Government Departments concerned.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *759*, if he will publish a list of all the documents relating to the Scott inquiry that have been destroyed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 April, *Official Report*, column *573*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police, South Wales

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now agree to the chief constable of South Wales's bid for an increase in the police establishment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. My right hon. and learned Friend has decided that, in view of the need to maintain firm controls over public expenditure, the costs of increases in police establishments in 1993-94 cannot be justified.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish centrally funded facilities to assist overseas domestic workers seeking protection from abusive employers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has given to the report of an investigation into the conditions of overseas domestic workers, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have replied to the organisation that sent a copy of the report to my right hon. and learned Friend. I have placed a copy of our reply in the Library.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were held on remand in custody in prisons in England and Wales as at 1 May.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 12 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the population of remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. The latest available information is for 31 March 1993 and shows that 9,687 male and 309 female untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners were held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. No prisoners were held in police cells at this time.

Metropolitan Police (Racialism)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been dismissed from the Metropolitan police force following proven charges of racialism in the course of their duties as police officers in each of the last three years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for the Commissioner. However, I am informed that no Metropolitan police officer has been found guilty of the disciplinary offence of racially discriminatory behaviour in the past three years.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were serving a life prison sentence in prisons in the United Kingdom as at 1 May.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 12 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the population of life sentence prisoners in Prison Service establishments. The latest available information is for 31 March 1993 and shows that there were 3,108 prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales serving life sentences, of whom 3,000 were men and 108 were women.

Arrests

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* formally cautioned and *(c)* charged with an offence for each of the last 10 years in each police force area.

Mr. Jack: Information concerning arrests, for all offences, 1981 to 1991 is given in the table. Cautioning data by police force area is published annually in "Criminal statistics England and Wales Supplementary tables Volume 3", table S3.7A in issues 1981 to 1990 and table S3.6A in issue 1991 refer. Copies are available in the Library. 1992 information will not be available until the autumn. Data on the number of people charged are not collected centrally.

Arrests for all types of offences

Police force area	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	35,891	38,350	37,930	39,796	40,687	34,190	36,290	37,592	39,852	42,421	39,216
Bedfordshire	15,831	16,679	16,068	16,699	17,147	14,232	15,694	15,864	14,886	17,705	17,543
Cambridgeshire	17,757	16,544	16,303	15,702	16,187	15,552	17,239	16,388	16,466	18,389	17,699
Cheshire	18,511	19,526	19,730	19,824	21,265	21,207	23,310	24,068	25,103	27,823	29,684
Cleveland	24,565	24,181	27,560	25,982	27,049	24,226	24,670	24,351	25,527	26,584	28,061
Cumbria	12,434	13,612	13,379	14,430	15,959	14,446	14,591	16,346	18,244	19,479	21,275
Derbyshire	17,850	19,253	20,167	22,120	21,687	19,044	20,126	20,751	22,781	23,079	23,708
Devon and Cornwall	21,499	23,336	25,819	26,679	28,999	25,342	27,704	28,717	30,786	31,404	34,024
Dorset	13,068	14,197	14,356	13,332	13,554	12,880	13,478	13,981	16,048	17,487	18,382
Durham	16,616	18,427	18,274	19,712	18,943	18,286	21,762	23,303	25,415	25,965	25,125
Essex	31,138	33,792	34,805	47,965	38,184	32,398	35,140	35,607	37,913	39,990	40,100
Gloucestershire	11,758	12,559	12,438	12,078	12,814	11,557	12,428	12,787	14,409	17,043	17,020
Greater Manchester	102,118	110,537	107,746	110,213	116,647	101,804	109,963	110,307	115,248	116,678	116,916
Hampshire	42,551	45,063	44,325	44,022	50,194	49,796	52,052	54,419	61,063	63,171	62,330
Hertfordshire	19,092	19,463	20,129	18,963	18,487	16,405	20,538	20,114	22,868	22,648	23,191
Humberside	30,662	34,081	35,095	33,480	35,997	34,807	35,106	32,981	35,568	36,066	35,847
Kent	37,003	39,173	38,491	38,236	41,520	41,428	46,808	47,806	47,253	47,007	47,992
Lancashire	39,844	39,983	45,261	49,848	48,666	46,197	47,881	51,053	53,129	57,235	62,104
Leicestershire	21,202	21,293	20,660	19,952	22,159	20,262	20,945	22,181	24,604	24,949	26,417
Lincolnshire	13,203	13,938	14,747	11,987	13,010	13,797	17,282	16,550	18,089	21,474	22,680
London, City of	3,390	3,577	3,582	3,596	3,511	3,558	3,702	4,248	4,489	4,809	4,688
Merseyside	57,139	57,165	60,452	60,554	59,216	51,467	54,088	56,914	62,559	69,207	72,930
Metropolitan Police[1]	340,809	362,137	364,703	349,941	[1]109,786	103,084	109,587	108,706	111,420	116,865	113,586
Norfolk	10,155	13,951	16,010	16,292	16,448	14,812	17,232	17,765	19,131	22,727	20,898
Northamptonshire	15,151	15,505	15,407	15,868	14,572	13,382	14,193	16,088	16,993	18,242	19,353
Northumbria	62,121	61,180	56,764	53,704	57,203	54,999	60,206	59,302	62,415	65,694	68,847
North Yorkshire	11,829	12,370	12,532	13,780	14,308	14,216	16,656	17,541	17,531	20,221	20,936
Nottinghamshire	32,625	33,532	34,106	29,835	35,485	35,970	37,423	38,481	42,679	45,468	46,487
South Yorkshire	44,550	46,653	46,097	48,903	49,681	32,791	35,859	37,731	39,914	43,979	45,722
Staffordshire	31,833	33,719	34,782	38,118	36,405	31,831	34,585	32,351	36,481	36,861	39,142
Suffolk	12,452	12,509	12,434	13,134	13,778	10,450	12,010	12,574	13,053	13,905	15,796
Surrey	17,536	18,255	19,357	18,622	17,101	16,569	18,582	18,495	19,468	20,920	19,940
Sussex	35,294	36,492	35,817	34,174	33,348	29,872	32,448	31,329	35,574	37,358	39,247
Thames Valley	42,076	46,950	49,254	48,136	51,817	47,686	48,199	50,225	57,246	59,098	59,458
Warwickshire	—	8,846	8,671	8,667	9,379	10,112	10,625	10,998	12,812	13,161	14,138
West Mercia	22,692	24,104	24,522	25,525	26,123	25,004	25,027	26,114	28,590	32,285	32,048
West Midlands	87,376	91,158	91,933	90,816	97,329	86,602	93,562	104,116	119,069	123,868	131,062
West Yorkshire	56,702	59,504	58,277	55,609	60,577	67,103	70,640	70,093	78,215	84,172	85,867
Wiltshire	8,857	9,029	9,388	10,749	10,876	8,586	9,846	11,187	13,195	14,507	13,670
Dyfed-Powys	8,605	9,422	9,589	11,368	10,932	8,191	8,803	10,224	11,774	12,699	13,466
Gwent	15,955	16,407	15,871	14,949	16,101	14,811	16,338	16,694	16,855	17,060	17,796
North Wales	11,003	12,248	13,977	15,801	17,461	16,502	18,092	18,951	20,626	22,629	24,338
South Wales	35,795	42,915	45,453	50,964	52,874	44,814	46,901	50,099	52,645	56,061	57,143

[1] From 1985 MPD decided only to record arrest figures in terms of notifiable offences.

Police Evidence

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces are currently able to comply with the recommendations in the report of the working group on pre-trial issues *(a)* that witnesses' statements, interview records, case summaries and records of previous convictions be typed, *(b)* that there be a time limit of three weeks for the police to provide a full file of evidence to the Crown prosecution service and *(c)* that there be a time limit of two weeks for the police to provide

an abbreviated file of evidence to the Crown prosecution service; and what is his assessment of the reasons for the extent of non-compliance.

Mr. Jack: Around a quarter of all police forces have so far implemented the full typing recommendations. The balance of forces are working to achieve this by 31 December 1993 a date set in 1992 as one of the recommendations of the steering group on pre-trial issues. All forces have introduced the time limit guidance for the provision of full and abbreviated files to the Crown prosecution service. While there will always be complex or difficult cases where it is not possible to meet the targets, police forces are working to achieve compliance with the standard.

Prison Population

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of prisoners in each prison in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Dawn Primarolo, dated 12 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question, for written answer on 10 May, on the average population in each Prison Service establishment.

The attached table shows the average population in all establishments in England and Wales in 1992-93.

Average population figures for year ending 31 March 1993

	Number
Acklington	677
Albany	252
Aldington	103
Ashwell	384
Askham Grange	97
Aylesbury	231
Bedford	245
Belmarsh	732
Birmingham	888
Blantyre House	93
Blundeston	325
Brinsford	319
Bristol	398
Brixton	718
Brockhill	150
Bullingdon	418
Bullwood Hall	104
Camp Hill	396
Canterbury	167
Cardiff	424
Castington	239
Channings Wood	562
Chelmsford	337
Coldingley	205
Cookham Wood	112
Dartmoor	509
Deerbolt	493
Dorchester	193
Dover	218
Downview	280
Drake Hall	166
Durham	646
East Sutton Park	78
Elmley	502
Erlestoke	205
Everthorpe	221
Exeter	380
Featherstone	547
Feltham	867
Finnamore Wood	76
Ford	457
Frankland	309
Full Sutton	439
Garth	484
Gartree	241
Glen Parva	686
Gloucester	190
Grendon	180
Guys Marsh	141
Haslar	110
Hatfield	146
Haverigg	304
Hewell Grange	134
High Down	319
Highpoint	598
HIndley	393
Hollesley Bay	288
Holloway	456
Holme House	445
Hull	330
Huntercombe	191
Kingston	94
Kirkham	465
Kirklevington	19

Dr. Kypros Loucas

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 March, *Official Report*, column *320*, if a decision has yet been reached on the employment of Dr. Kypros Loucas at Wormwood Scrubs prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated 12 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the employment of Dr. Kypros Loucas.

The employment of Dr. Loucas at HMP Wormwood Scrubs was terminated with effect from 22 March 1993.

Minimum Sentences

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses *(a)* when deciding whether to make a recommendation of minimum sentence and *(b)* when making that recommendation.

Mr. Jack: It is assumed that by "recommendation of minimum sentence", the hon. Member refers to the part played by the Secretary of State in the administration of the mandatory sentence of life imprisonment. This is the only occasion on which the Secretary of State would be involved in considering the minimum period that should be served in custody; in such cases, it is his responsibility to determine, after taking into account the views of the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice, the minimum period necessary to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence. This period is known as the "tariff".

Prison Medical Officers

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of whole-time equivalent prison medical officers in each prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Dawn Primarolo, dated 12 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding the number of whole time equivalent prison medical officers in each prison.

There are 243 prison medical officers employed in the Prison Service. This figure includes medical officers of all grades and part-time medical officers where appropriate. In some instances two part-time posts will form a full-time equivalent.

A list of all establishments showing the breakdown of prison medical officers in each prison by grade and indicating both full and part-time posts has been laid in the library of the House.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of complaints against the police investigated in each police authority in England and Wales for each year since 1987.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Figures of those complaints that receive a full investigation are not readily available. The table gives figures for all complaint cases received by forces during 1987-92. A case may consist of more than one matter giving cause for complaint.

Complaints cases received 1987-1992
Police forces in England and Wales

	Total cases received					
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Avon and Somerset	412	463	446	561	641	726
Bedfordshire	131	117	111	125	138	183
Cambridgeshire	134	174	227	273	252	212
Cheshire	298	293	315	335	313	355
City of London	36	41	41	45	49	24
Cleveland	339	319	311	252	293	275
Cumbria	263	239	284	298	251	275
Derbyshire	239	258	288	310	296	315
Devon and Cornwall	254	271	294	447	500	488
Dorset	220	216	201	179	170	160
Durham	298	329	238	201	206	166
Dyfed and Powys	149	179	184	137	156	153
Essex	268	294	350	405	426	394
Gloucestershire	182	224	230	252	322	329
Greater Manchester	1,265	1,289	1,398	1,700	1,750	1,820
Gwent	209	226	289	266	268	234
Hampshire	394	350	614	628	586	583
Hertfordshire	171	212	229	239	272	238
Humberside	435	447	420	501	471	463
Kent	359	440	428	392	452	512
Lanccashire	260	281	317	338	447	463
Leicestershire	340	327	345	400	286	306
Lincolnshire	182	134	81	74	65	74
Merseyside	778	839	1,008	1,181	1,101	1,204
Norfolk	229	216	253	299	303	328
Northamptonshire	110	104	136	185	195	192
Northumbria	385	413	441	508	474	470
North Wales	135	112	234	317	280	314
North Yorkshire	131	189	200	218	184	185
Nottinghamshire	283	340	380	387	389	388
South Wales	539	573	596	546	580	625
South Yorkshire	331	349	436	442	380	435
Staffordshire	379	441	476	499	554	478
Suffolk	203	181	229	224	198	251
Surrey	210	210	247	264	232	226
Sussex	193	161	199	285	368	477
Thames Valley	438	399	420	458	398	522
Warwickshire	110	117	171	233	155	105
West Mercia	257	320	371	381	297	321
West Midlands	644	748	944	958	948	1,075
West Yorkshire	932	922	1,058	977	973	944
Wiltshire	162	160	166	193	141	151
Metropolitan	4,864	5,294	5,350	4,371	3,928	4,294
Total	18,149	19,211	20,956	21,284	20,688	21,733

NHS Loto

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the police completed their investigation into the National Hospital Trust lottery scheme, NHS Loto, mentioned in paragraph 85 of the report of the Gaming Board for Great Britain 1989-90; what was the outcome of the investigation; and what action has since been taken.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the case is currently being considered by the Crown prosecution service in the light of recent reports by the police.

Immigration Service (Privatisation)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to privatise or contract out duties presently carried out by immigration officials; what research has been carried out to assess the possibility of future privatisation in this area; what representations he has received on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office market testing programme for 1992-93 includes the provision of catering and security guard services and the recruitment of Immigration Service personnel by the immigration and nationality department. The proposals for 1993-94 are to market test in the immigration and nationality department, the typing, postroom and registries, reprographic and messengerial support services. Discussions have been held including with trade union representatives.

My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to market test the work of immigration officers at ports of entry or the work of other officials who take decisions on his behalf under immigration law.

Refugees

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied children under 18 years applied for refugee status on arrival in the United Kingdom in 1992 and in each month in 1993; and what was the country of origin of these children.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is given in the table.

Unaccompanied[1] children, aged 17 or under applying for asylum on their arrival in the United Kingdom, by nationality

	1992 (whole year)	*1993*			
		January	*February*	*March*	*April*
Afghanistan	11	2	3	2	—
Angola	3	—	—	—	—
Colombia	1	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	1	—	—	—	—
Ethiopia	19	3	—	1	—
Ghana	3	—	—	—	—
Ivory Coast	—	—	—	—	1
Iraq	1	1	—	—	—
Iran	1	—	—	—	—
Kenya	—	1	—	—	1
Lebanon	3	—	1	—	—
Libya	1	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	1	—	—	—	—
Pakistan	1	—	—	—	—
Poland	3	2	—	—	—
Sierra Leone	1	—	—	1	—
Somalia	53	7	1	5	4
Sri Lanka	36	4	—	7	1
Turkey	14	2	1	3	1
Uganda	4	—	—	4	—
Former Yugoslavia	18	—	—	—	—
Zaire	10	—	—	—	3
Total	185	22	6	23	11

[1] Unaccompanied at the point of their arrival, and not known to be joining a close relative in the United Kingdom.

Police (Contracting Unit)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for contracting out functions and duties currently carried out by the Metropolitan police and other police forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Compulsory competitive tendering is to be extended to 40 per cent. of the annual cost of police vehicle maintenance and repair in the first instance, and to 90 per cent. of the annual cost of the cleaning of police buildings. CCT will also be extended in due course to a proportion of the cost of police authority and construction services.

The Metropolitan police are not covered by local authority statutory requirements, but a policy of market testing has been introduced. The aim is to test up to 30 per cent. of the work of the personnel, finance, technology, and property services departments over the next two and a half years. Action plans are also being drawn up to market test other administrative and support functions. The extend to which the above work will be contracted out or retained in-house will depend upon the results of individual testing exercises.

I refer also to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 16 February, at columnn *139*, that the court escort service in the Metropolitan police district and in three other areas should be contracted out.

Safer Cities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sums of money the Government are making available directly to each of the original 16 safer city projects during the transitional period, together with the date on which transitional finance will commence in each case and the length of time for which it will continue to be available in each case.

Mr. Jack: The original 16 safer cities projects will cease to receive Home Office funding after March 1994.

Each of these projects has £100,000 available in grant funding in 1993-94 to support local crime prevention schemes. In addition, in the current financial year they have access to further funds from a central pool of £500,000 which has been set aside to assist the development locally of continuing structures from the maintenance of multi-agency crime prevention work.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used to decide how the transitional money being made available to the original 16 safer cities projects should be allocated to the respective projects.

Mr. Jack: The original 16 safer cities projects due to close in March 1994 have access to a central pool of £500,000 to assist the development locally of continuing structures for the maintenance of multi-agency crime prevention work. That is the only criterion for the use of this money. The projects were invited to submit their plans and expenditure proposals to the Home Office on the assumption that, subject to the viability of the plans, they will each receive about £31,000 from the pool.

Rail Lines (Vandalism)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a table listing the dates, details and sentences of court hearings for acts of vandalism on rail lines during each of the last three years.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

The information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, for the period concerned the number of prosecutions for vandalism on rail lines is as follows:

	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*Total*
1991	582	48	630
1992	531	59	590
[1]1993	106	11	117

[1] 1 January 1993 to 11 May 1993.

These figures include summary and indictable prosecutions and sentences ranged from four years imprisonment to conditional discharges, depending on the severity of each individual incident.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to bring forward any measures necessary to empower a traffic warden to require the production at a police station by a motorist of a current certificate of motor vehicle insurance in any case in which he or she is currently empowered to require production of a driving licence;

(2) what powers he has to extend to traffic wardens the power to require a motorist to produce at a police station a certificate of vehicle insurance in any case in which he or she is currently empowered to require production of a driving licence.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answers 10 and 11 May 1993]:* Sections 95(5) and 96 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 empower the Secretary of State to make a statutory instrument prescribing the appropriate functions of traffic wardens. Those provisions could be used to empower traffic wardens to require the production of a current certificate of motor insurance in the circumstances described. There are no plans at present to do so.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes were recorded for the Metropolitan police area and for each borough within the metropolitan area in 1989, 1991 and 1992;

(2) how many crimes were recorded for the Metropolitan police area and for each borough within the metropolitan area in 1989, 1991 and 1992 as *(a)* burglary of a house, *(b)*, non-domestic burglary, *(c)* theft from a motor vehicle and *(d)* theft of a motor vehicle, including taking without consent;

(3) how many crimes in each category of crime were recorded for the Metropolitan police area and for each borough within the metropolitan area in 1989, 1991 and 1992;

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* Tables giving recorded crime figures broken down by offence group and by borough within the Metropolitan police district are in the Library. Figures for burglary in a dwelling, other burglary and theft of and from motor vehicles by borough have been supplied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and are given in the tables.

Notifiable offences recorded by offence and Local authority, borough or district

Metropolitan police district

Borough/district	*Theft from a vehicle*			*Theft of a motor vehicle*		
	1989	*1991*	*1992*[1]	*1989*	*1991*	*1992*[1]
Barking	2,278	3,204	2,927	1,830	2,269	2,187
Barnet	3,142	4,362	4,723	1,345	2,012	2,019
Bexley	1,809	2,561	3,092	1,715	2,051	2,290
Brent	3,517	4,305	4,094	1,913	2,298	2,169
Bromley	3,306	4,574	5,090	1,762	2,674	3,032
Camden	6,395	6,929	7,624	1,938	2,255	2,144
Croydon	4,748	5,670	5,735	2,551	3,510	3,420
Ealing	3,689	4,462	5,089	2,280	2,714	2,723
Enfield	4,201	4,475	4,078	2,154	2,384	2,342

Borough/district	Theft from a vehicle			Theft of a motor vehicle		
	1989	1991	1992[1]	1989	1991	1992[1]
Greenwich	3,953	4,970	5,839	3,013	3,760	3,794
Hackney	4,762	5,348	5,510	2,820	2,938	3,095
Hammersmith	3,661	4,729	6,297	1,259	1,534	1,635
Haringey	3,867	4,571	4,711	2,281	2,482	2,506
Harrow	1,723	3,043	2,840	896	1,166	928
Havering	3,042	3,325	3,339	2,272	2,825	2,833
Hillingdon	2,899	4,337	4,527	1,964	2,148	2,076
Hounslow	2,345	3,521	4,444	1,343	2,000	1,963
Islington	4,561	5,520	5,282	2,078	2,389	2,381
Kensington and Chelsea	3,389	4,304	6,778	1,134	1,267	1,425
Kingston	1,546	2,306	2,321	643	936	767
Lambeth	6,147	8,084	7,128	3,628	3,928	3,560
Lewisham	4,874	4,694	4,454	2,771	3,381	3,426
Merton	2,560	3,454	3,159	1,332	1,552	1,175
Newham	5,528	5,108	4,476	3,433	3,550	3,635
Redbridge	3,525	3,223	3,065	2,173	2,869	3,027
Richmond	1,602	2,543	2,900	563	747	723
Southwark	6,062	7,761	7,615	3,039	3,855	3,414
Sutton	1,584	2,493	2,477	1,126	1,619	1,513
Tower Hamlets	5,571	6,158	5,931	2,745	2,895	2,699
Wandsworth	5,205	7,044	6,778	2,254	2,751	2,526
Waltham Forest	3,560	3,451	3,571	2,499	2,956	2,863
Westminster	6,458	6,555	8,110	1,665	2,030	1,789
Broxbourne (part)	712	918	709	373	501	490
Elmbridge (part)	479	666	857	180	214	200
Epping Forest (part)	949	982	1,116	544	590	853
Epsom and Ewell	475	796	867	253	427	354
Hertsmere	732	1,232	1,277	367	477	468
Reigate and Banstead (part)	492	500	522	155	250	248
Spelthorne	723	1,509	1,806	481	686	622
Welwyn Hatfield (part)	28	25	26	6	6	3
Heathrow Airport	478	735	794	117	169	140
Thames	—	13	—	—	11	1
Central cheque squad	1	—	—	—	2	1
Total	126,578	154,424	161,978	66,895	81,088	79,459

[1] Provisional

Notifiable offences recorded by offence and local authority, borough or district

Metropolitan police district

Borough/district	Burglary in a dwelling			Burglary in other building		
	1989	1991	1992[1]	1989	1991	1992[1]
Barking	1,246	2,136	2,329	1,056	1,801	1,546
Barnet	3,231	4,209	4,327	1,311	1,792	1,692
Bexley	1,264	1,896	1,975	889	988	1,301
Brent	3,700	5,138	5,819	1,612	2,029	2,000
Bromley	3,178	3,538	3,973	1,341	2,062	2,340
Camden	3,830	4,602	5,105	2,515	3,395	3,108
Croydon	3,041	4,063	4,503	1,723	1,968	2,199
Ealing	3,255	4,455	4,555	1,608	1,839	1,867
Enfield	2,999	3,131	3,103	1,379	1,815	1,844
Greenwich	3,097	4,335	4,560	1,387	2,134	2,388
Hackney	4,854	5,833	5,559	1,998	2,588	2,437
Hammersmith	2,616	3,602	3,266	1,056	1,126	1,364
Haringey	3,941	5,078	4,072	1,564	1,837	1,481
Harrow	1,682	2,390	2,852	746	988	1,007
Havering	1,374	2,340	2,710	1,193	1,555	1,596
Hillingdon	1,537	2,418	2,330	1,445	2,257	1,600
Hounslow	1,780	2,630	3,122	1,225	2,250	1,615
Islington	2,818	3,356	3,460	2,033	1,882	1,961
Kensington and Chelsea	4,164	4,492	4,422	1,406	1,184	1,441
Kingston	861	1,256	1,509	643	1,141	1,329
Lambeth	5,584	8,791	8,488	1,626	1,951	2,063
Lewisham	5,193	5,555	6,322	1,479	2,200	2,247
Merton	1,893	2,771	2,862	1,054	1,151	1,112
Newham	3,671	4,713	4,272	2,105	2,403	2,521
Redbridge	2,071	3,124	3,463	1,225	1,531	1,527
Richmond	1,348	2,013	1,791	741	1,526	1,086
Southwark	5,270	6,604	6,322	2,336	2,939	2,677
Sutton	1,305	1,755	1,966	626	1,166	1,277
Tower Hamlets	2,549	2,728	2,685	2,148	2,314	2,523
Wandsworth	3,775	5,844	4,244	1,727	2,092	1,966
Waltham Forest	2,820	3,229	3,208	1,474	1,390	1,438
Westminster	4,777	5,264	5,350	4,286	4,236	4,339

Borough/district	Burglary in a dwelling			Burglary in other building		
	1989	1991	1992[1]	1989	1991	1992[1]
Broxbourne (part)	369	325	324	432	291	308
Elmbridge (part)	421	510	468	245	234	339
Epping Forest (part)	487	514	587	247	324	436
Epsom and Ewell	428	708	687	360	451	435
Hertsmere	516	614	579	415	740	681
Reigate and Banstead (part)	265	357	354	138	263	173
Spelthorne	376	417	492	464	685	560
Welwyn Hatfield (part)	17	20	8	8	6	4
Heathrow airport	5	16	2	27	69	26
Thames	—	—	1	—	1	—
Total	97,608	126,770	128,026	51,293	64,594	63,854

[1] Provisional

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes were recorded in 1992 for *(a)* each county in England and Wales and *(b)* each district within each county; and what was the percentage change in each case compared with the equivalent figures for (i) 1991 and (ii) 1989;

(2) how many crimes were recorded for each category of crime in 1992 for *(a)* each county in England and Wales and *(b)* each district within each county; and what was the percentage change in each case compared with the equivalent figure in (i) 1991 and (ii) 1989;

(3) how many crimes were recorded for each police authority area in England and Wales in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 as being (i) burglary of homes, (ii) non-domestic burglary, (iii) theft from motor vehicles and cars and (iv) theft of motor vehicles, including taking without consent.

(4) what was the total number of crimes recorded for each category of crime for each police force area in England and Wales in 1992.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The information collected centrally relates to police force areas and the available statistics are provided in the tables. Figures for crimes recorded by category in 1989 and 1991 are published by police force area in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" in table 2.5

Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area and offence group

England and Wales 1992 — *Number of offences*

Police force area	Total	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Other offences
Avon and Somerset	175,404	5,151	586	1,320	43,163	94,469	5,699	24,368	648
Bedfordshire	59,436	1,900	254	605	15,775	30,414	2,101	8,137	250
Cambridgeshire	66,339	2,777	437	291	14,383	38,752	1,764	7,529	406
Cheshire	79,491	2,784	459	320	21,766	39,514	2,414	10,866	1,368
Cleveland	84,312	2,651	268	289	20,504	44,798	1,679	13,839	284
Cumbria	45,336	1,945	168	100	11,673	22,543	858	7,744	305
Derbyshire	88,449	3,973	418	345	22,225	44,686	1,349	14,838	615
Devon and Cornwall	114,675	3,926	665	310	28,728	60,658	3,601	15,936	851
Dorset	52,238	1,505	345	164	9,957	29,997	3,726	5,761	783
Durham	67,315	2,447	412	153	13,486	34,822	2,572	12,923	500
Essex	115,062	4,334	620	530	26,497	61,748	3,670	16,959	704
Gloucestershire	60,601	1,646	269	268	16,405	34,074	2,087	5,439	413
Greater Manchester	395,195	10,128	1,409	4,310	103,390	192,988	11,819	68,498	2,653
Hampshire	153,256	5,245	1,121	605	34,533	83,636	5,146	21,736	1,234
Hertfordshire	59,129	1,882	294	349	12,427	32,734	1,594	9,426	423
Humberside	128,743	4,950	773	419	38,954	60,571	3,184	19,383	509
Kent	159,881	5,736	1,100	605	31,099	89,244	4,356	26,326	1,415
Lancashire	132,138	3,196	420	530	27,480	70,678	3,833	24,869	1,132
Leicestershire	97,468	3,490	559	864	23,251	52,480	3,156	13,141	527
Lincolnshire	49,306	2,229	316	119	10,990	26,057	1,404	7,636	555
London, City of	6,768	230	29	62	875	4,630	485	391	66
Merseyside	149,672	7,134	705	2,036	34,624	74,598	5,098	23,650	1,827
Metropolitan police district	942,878	37,669	5,876	23,555	191,880	465,564	39,664	171,949	6,721
Norfolk	66,996	1,833	384	212	17,027	36,744	1,814	8,503	479
Northamptonshire	59,550	2,466	295	293	13,115	29,600	1,556	11,820	405
Northumbria	224,442	6,348	766	1,064	66,072	93,193	3,507	52,664	828
North Yorkshire	54,816	1,921	226	129	15,610	29,511	1,033	5,951	435
Nottinghamshire	164,417	8,314	1,083	1,065	36,374	87,942	4,023	25,009	607
South Yorkshire	137,336	4,896	593	716	41,907	65,550	2,009	20,446	1,219
Staffordshire	97,536	5,452	446	391	28,830	46,184	2,246	13,503	484
Suffolk	44,721	2,087	375	150	9,004	23,729	1,772	6,997	607
Surrey	53,468	2,025	395	224	12,021	29,605	2,078	6,793	327
Sussex	119,364	3,134	845	542	28,983	66,402	3,820	14,363	1,275
Thames Valley	197,799	4,762	845	1,011	37,424	114,337	7,651	30,518	1,251
Warwickshire	44,996	1,275	237	128	12,741	23,384	1,129	5,832	270
West Mercia	79,175	3,429	505	246	16,926	45,033	1,342	11,203	491
West Midlands	329,260	11,637	1,583	5,008	101,111	150,994	8,293	48,804	1,830

Police force area	Total	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Other offences
West Yorkshire	305,264	9,605	1,361	2,761	90,231	148,447	6,183	44,252	2,424
Wiltshire	42,229	2,570	475	135	9,223	21,621	1,711	6,069	425
Dyfed-Powys	28,539	2,188	389	49	5,100	14,307	906	5,311	289
Gwent	40,961	2,394	334	117	8,239	22,085	1,095	6,356	341
North Wales	49,204	2,611	336	113	12,472	23,891	1,354	8,040	387
South Wales	168,554	5,904	552	391	38,799	82,334	3,819	35,935	820
England and Wales	5,591,719	201,779	29,528	52,894	1,355,274	2,844,548	168,600	899,713	39,383

Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area
England and Wales

Police force area	Burglary in a dwelling		Burglary in a building other than a dwelling	
	1991	1992	1991	1992
Avon and Somerset	15,795	22,225	18,166	20,938
Bedfordshire	6,057	6,999	6,816	8,776
Cambridgeshire	4,828	6,361	7,069	8,022
Cheshire	8,317	9,907	8,220	11,859
Cleveland	10,190	13,151	7,088	7,353
Cumbria	4,426	4,791	6,400	6,882
Derbyshire	7,116	8,335	11,384	13,890
Devon and Cornwall	11,345	12,894	14,363	15,834
Dorset	4,862	5,286	4,425	4,671
Durham	6,464	7,091	7,101	6,395
Essex	9,807	10,016	15,173	16,481
Gloucestershire	5,387	7,505	7,214	8,900
Greater Manchester	59,605	63,868	38,110	39,522
Hampshire	14,062	15,610	17,941	18,923
Hertfordshire	4,935	5,391	5,955	7,036
Humberside	12,882	15,190	20,067	23,764
Kent	15,836	18,467	10,699	12,632
Lancashire	13,971	16,654	11,074	10,826
Leicestershire	11,513	12,330	10,013	10,921
Lincolnshire	4,251	5,640	4,740	5,350
City of London	73	40	997	835
Merseyside	21,473	22,465	12,136	12,159
Metropolitan police district	126,861	128,026	64,621	63,854
Norfolk	6,023	6,078	9,313	10,949
Northamptonshire	5,742	6,019	6,406	7,096
Northumbria	31,413	32,499	34,688	33,573
North Yorkshire	4,975	7,096	7,363	8,514
Nottinghamshire	14,092	18,753	16,476	17,621
South Yorkshire	15,085	18,372	20,176	23,535
Staffordshire	9,846	12,570	13,677	16,260
Suffolk	2,859	3,648	4,779	5,356
Surrey	5,157	5,276	6,280	6,745
Sussex	13,427	15,272	13,047	13,711
Thames Valley	17,545	19,542	16,520	17,882
Warwickshire	3,228	4,279	7,062	8,462
West Mercia	6,208	7,760	8,387	9,166
West Midlands	41,624	52,202	42,460	48,909
West Yorkshire	41,857	51,825	36,769	38,406
Wiltshire	3,564	4,334	4,594	4,889
England	602,701	683,767	557,769	606,897
Dyfed-Powys	1,528	1,545	3,168	3,555
Gwent	3,227	3,960	4,250	4,279
North Wales	3,876	4,586	6,308	7,886
South Wales	13,614	14,374	23,023	24,425
Wales	22,245	24,465	36,749	40,145
England and Wales	624,946	708,232	594,518	647,042

Notifiable offences recorded by the police
England and Wales

Police force area	*Theft from a vehicle*		*Theft of a vehicle*	
	1991	*1992*	*1991*	*1992*
Avon and Somerset	10,181	32,109	19,903	24,873
Bedfordshire	12,035	11,008	8,292	8,069
Cambridgeshire	8,998	11,403	4,655	5,796
Cheshire	9,485	12,866	8,289	9,010
Cleveland	12,369	12,063	11,712	12,433
Cumbria	6,627	8,315	3,632	3,113
Derbyshire	13,621	17,052	7,410	9,024
Devon and Cornwall	19,526	22,023	7,923	7,641
Dorset	8,618	8,593	4,560	3,677
Durham	10,053	9,760	8,640	8,588
Essex	20,610	20,509	11,377	11,493
Gloucestershire	11,432	14,563	3,927	4,642
Greater Manchester	60,461	60,112	55,338	57,862
Hampshire	26,720	28,824	11,919	11,003
Hertfordshire	10,548	12,046	6,149	6,467
Humberside	17,909	19,953	8,506	8,839
Kent	23,558	24,971	17,962	18,910
Lancashire	21,687	23,655	11,042	12,288
Leicestershire	16,104	18,239	10,751	11,195
Lincolnshire	4,958	6,801	2,779	3,241
City of London	839	975	239	143
Merseyside	22,156	20,514	16,983	15,894
Metropolitan police district	154,453	161,978	81,173	79,459
Norfolk	12,780	13,197	5,510	4,711
Northamptonshire	10,466	8,909	6,514	6,701
Northumbria	32,680	28,030	30,356	28,954
North Yorkshire	8,312	9,069	4,999	4,300
Nottinghamshire	27,884	27,523	17,603	16,913
South Yorkshire	21,848	22,572	16,323	17,915
Staffordshire	15,382	16,710	9,290	11,505
Suffolk	6,037	6,453	2,721	2,702
Surrey	9,851	10,923	4,860	4,912
Sussex	21,020	22,981	9,251	8,953
Thames Valley	40,302	42,834	22,556	22,017
Warwickshire	8,244	8,925	4,700	4,898
West Mercia	11,937	13,264	8,652	7,861
West Midlands	54,360	56,249	41,415	39,574
West Yorkshire	55,425	52,807	40,235	35,821
Wiltshire	5,900	6,530	2,967	2,759
England	865,376	905,308	551,113	554,156
Dyfed-Powys	3,029	3,393	1,476	1,464
Gwent	6,786	6,569	3,240	3,678
North Wales	6,970	8,230	3,102	3,551
South Wales	31,115	30,748	22,970	22,654
Wales	47,900	48,940	30,788	31,347
England and Wales	913,276	954,248	581,901	585,503

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Northern Cyprus

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Government Ministers have visited northern cyprus since 1979.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Five.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of the United Kingdom's relations with the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, and on the implications of the visit of the Lord Chancellor to Northern Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We do not recognise the so-called Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, and neither does any other country except Turkey. We do acknowledge the legitimate interests of the Turkish Cypriot community, and have contact with their leaders in order to promote United Nations efforts for an intercommunal settlement in Cyprus and where British consular or other interests are concerned. The Lord Chancellor's informal meeting with Mr. Denktash is in line with this policy; and has no implications for our policy of non-recognition.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations his Department carried out with non-governmental organisations concerned with proliferation matters prior to preparing the British policy position and proposals for the first preparatory committee meeting on 10 to 14 May for the fifth review conference on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; and what criteria were used in choosing the non-governmental organisations with which he consulted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our Department has regular contacts with non-governmental organisations interested in the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and intends to continue these. We received no requests from such organisations for consultations on our policy in regard to this meeting.

Arms Transfers

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) of 5 May, *Official Report*, column *144*, what was the cost of compiling the United Kingdom submission to the United Nations register of conventional arms transfers; to whom it has been circulated; and what was the purpose of the exports to countries where this is not covered by a note.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested about the cost of the register is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The United Kingdom's return was submitted to the United Nations Secretary-General on 29 April. It was circulated to conference on security and co-operation in Europe participating states on 5 May. The purpose of exports not covered by a footnote in the United Kingdom's return was the fulfilment of contracts placed by the Governments of the countries concerned.

Hungary

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if she will make a statement on the purpose and outcome of his recent visit to Hungary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the oral answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 12 May, *Official Report*, column 787.

Belize

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Belize about the proposals to withdraw British troops and personnel from Belize.

Mr. Garel Jones: We forewarned the Belizean Government about our plans for the evolution of the British military presence and have taken account of their concerns.

Diplomatic Estate

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, if he will list those publications, in addition to the *Official Journal*, of the European Community, in which invitations are routinely published for construction companies to tender for work on the overseas diplomatic estate.

Mr. Goodlad: The answer is 2,595. Invitations to tender are not routinely published. It is our policy to invite tenders from construction companies shortlisted after pre-selection procedures.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, how often, and in what format, the further information about a wider range of projects to which he refers is circulated to the Export Group for the Construction Industries; if that information includes all opportunities for work on the overseas diplomatic estate, or only selected opportunities for such work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The answer is 2,596. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office sends a list about once a year to the Export Group for the Construction Industries of key details about planned projects likely to be of interest to United Kingdom construction companies and of an estimated value above a stated threshold. For 1983-86 the threshold was £250,000; for 1987-89, £500,000; and since 1990, £1 million. The latest list will be sent within the next few weeks.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, who are the current members of the Export Group for the Construction Industries.

Mr. Goodlad: We understand that the current membership of the Export Group for the Construction Industries is as follows:

ACER Group
Amec International Construction
Balfour Beatty
Biwater International
Bovis
Brown & Root
CEGELEC Projects
Costain Civil Engineering
Drake & Scull International
John Laing International
Kier International
Lilley Construction
Alfred McAlpine International
Maples
Miller Construction
Mivan Overseas
Mowlem International
Edmund Nuttall
Rotary Group
Sterling International Civil Engineering
Tarmac construction
Taylor Woodrow International
Trafalgar House Construction
Wade Adams Construction
George Wimpey International

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373* if he will make a statement on the grounds upon which the French company Glauser International was awarded the £4·8 million contract for the work on the new immigration and consular building in Islamabad.

Mr. Goodlad: Glauser International was awarded the contract, in preference to the other three firms—one of them British—who submitted tenders, because its tender was the lowest, it had an established presence in Pakistan and it offered higher levels of supervision, including an experienced British project manager, and an earlier completion date.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, if he will list those criteria by which practicable participation is assessed when considering tenders by British companies for work on the overseas diplomatic estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The criteria for practicable participation in given local circumstances are assessed when drawing up the short list of companies to be invited to tender. The criteria include local regulations about the participation of non-local companies and of joint ventures, the managerial and technical competence and the financial status of companies under consideration, the extent of their local presence, experience and knowledge of local working conditions, and their track record in comparable circumstances.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, if he will make a statement providing details of the way in which best value for money is assessed when considering tenders by British companies for work on the overseas diplomatic estate.

Mr. Goodlad: British companies that meet the pre-qualification criteria are invited to tender in competition with local or other companies, similarly pre-qualified: this ensures competition and the best value of money for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. After their receipt, tenders are assessed on price, compliance with the technical documentation—or acceptable alternatives—and project execution capability.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish details of those contracts valued at £500,000 or more which have been awarded for work on the overseas diplomatic estate in each of the last five years for which figures are available; if he will indicate, in each case, the location of the work, the value of the contract awarded, the name and the nationality of the company which was given the contract; if any British company tendered for the work; in which publications advertisements for the tender were placed; and why, if a British company tendered for the work, its bid was not successful.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested is being deposited in the Library of the House.

Political Parties (State Funding)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have taken place since his answer of 17 July 1990, *Official Report*, column *496*, in arrangements for state funding for politcal parties in each of the Group of Seven nations.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The information available to us is as follows:

(a) Canada
No change from the answer of 17 July 1990, *Official Report*, column *496*;

(b) France
A Bill passed in autumn 1992 provided for:
(i) public funding of political parties which put up at least 50 candidates, in proportion to their share of the vote in the legislative elections and where applicable, to the number of their senators and deputies; and
(ii) reimbursement of campaign expenses up to a maximum of FF50,000, provided that the candidate obtains at least 5 per cent. of the vote in the first round.
These arrangements will not come into effect until after 1994.

(c) Germany
The existing legislation—1990 answer—is under review.

(d) Italy
Italians voted in the referendums on 18 and 19 April to abolish state funding of political parties.

(e) Japan
No change in formal state funding.

(f) United States
President Clinton introduced on 7 May a proposal for campaign finance reform. Under it, candidates accepting voluntary limits on spending would receive vouchers for broadcast air time, postage and printing from federal funds. These would be financed by closing a loophole allowing tax deductions for lobbying expenses and increasing the voluntary check-off on tax returns to $5. The proposal is controversial.

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INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1992–93

4th May, 1993—14th May, 1993

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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